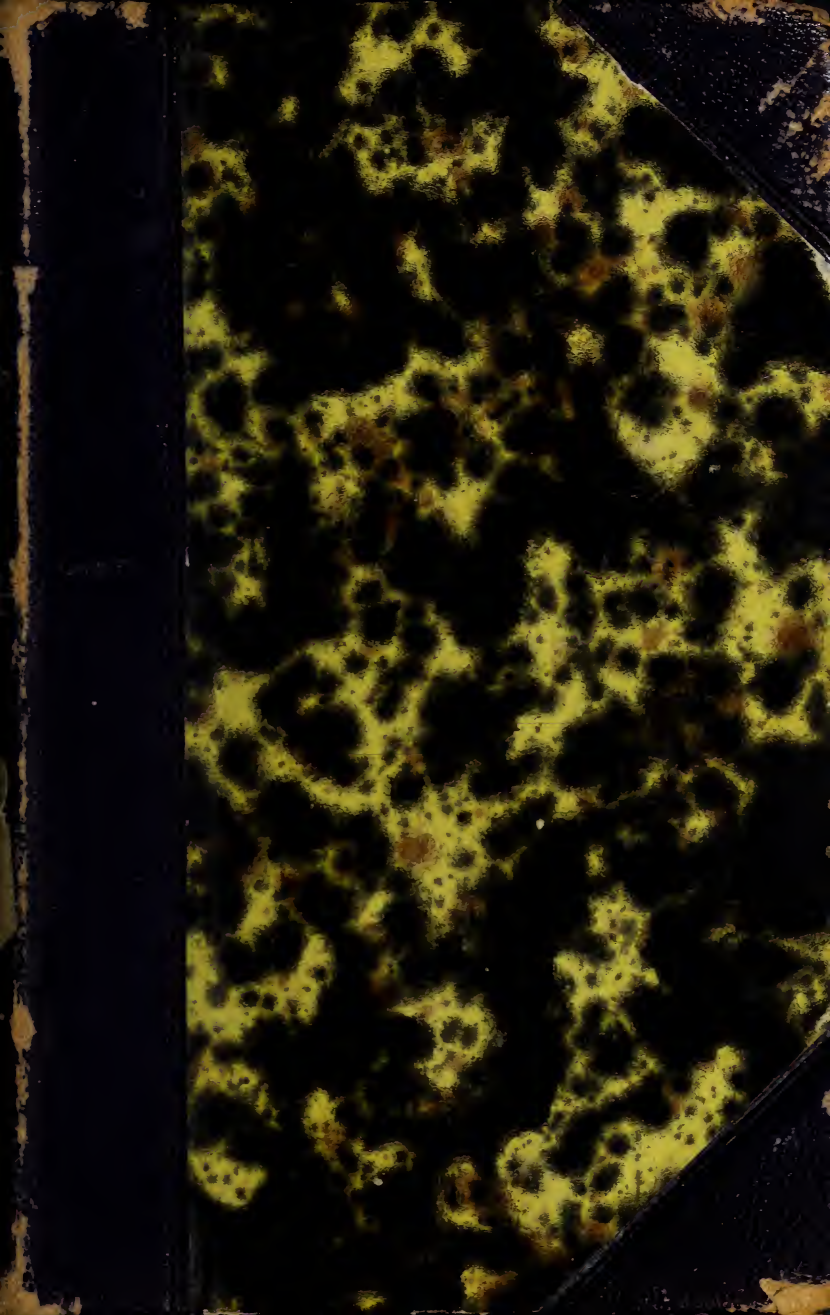




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UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

APOLOGY

FOR THE

DISBELIEF

OF

REVEALED RELIGION:

Consisting of

TWO TRACTS REPRINTED;

THE LATTER WITH SOME ADDITIONS.

By JOHN HOLLIS, Esq.

“ I look upon the *right of private judgment* in every concern respecting God and ourselves, as *superior to the controul of human authority*; and have ever regarded *free discussion* as the *best mean of illustrating the doctrine*, and *establishing the truth of Christianity*.”

BISHOP OF LLANDAFF.

LONDON:

PRINTED IN THE YEAR 1801.

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T. Bensley, Printer, Bolt Court, Fleet Street.

PREFACE

To the Second Edition.

BEING dissatisfied with the manner in which the two following pieces were originally printed, I have determined to reprint them, and, at the same time, to avail myself of the opportunity of presenting the reader with some additional matter, in confirmation of my argument. I have determined, I say, to *reprint*, but not to *republish* them. The second, indeed, of these pieces *never was published*, though the contrary is asserted in the Retrospect of Domestic Literature, which appears in the ninth volume of the Monthly Magazine.

What relates to me, I shall transcribe, and then shall take the liberty of commenting upon it.

“ Mr. Hollis (says the retrospec-
“ tor) has published An Apology for
“ the Disbelief of Revealed Religion.
“ If any apology be necessary for a
“ disbelief of revealed religion, as
“ this respectable infidel conceives it
“ is, it should be made to the throne
“ of heaven: we acknowledge the
“ jurisdiction of no earthly tribunal
“ in matters of religion. Belief is
“ an act not of volition, but of ne-
“ cessity. Whether the *publication*
“ of a man’s reasons for disbelief *re-*
“ *quires an apology*, is a different
“ question; at any rate, we see not
“ the use of such a pamphlet as the
“ present, which has little novelty
“ of argument.”

This

This critic, it should seem, takes it for granted, that an Apology implies the acknowledgment of something *wrong*; and, consequently, *blameable*. Did he then never read, or, if he has not read, did he never hear of, certain apologies of early christians for their religion? But if he has neither read nor heard of such ancient writings, he has certainly heard of, and possibly he may have read, a very recent Apology for the Bible, by a right reverend bishop. Now does this critic imagine either that the christians alluded to, meant to acknowledge how blameable they were in making profession of a bad religion, or that the bishop intended to confess the wickedness of the book for which he has thought fit to publish his celebrated Apology? How-

ever well informed this critic might be, it appears, he had yet to learn, that the term apology (whatever it signifies in vulgar speech) is used synonymously with the term, *defence*.

But this sagacious critic, adopting the vulgar sense of the term, intimates that it may be very proper to offer an apology to the throne of heaven for *disbelief*, while, at the same time, he argues, that there can be nothing *wrong* in a man's belief, because it is not an act of *volition* *. So, it should seem, according to him,

* He should have said a *voluntary act*. Every such act has a volition preceding it, but is not *itself* volition. They differ, as *cause* and *effect*. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as an *act* of volition. Volition is a *state of mind* from which the acts naturally flow which we term voluntary.

that

that though a man, with respect to some certain article of his conduct, may be conscious of no wrong, it may be very proper for him, nevertheless, to confess his guilt respecting that very article, before the throne of heaven.

This critic asserts, that in my pamphlet there is little *novelty* of argument. Now, with all just ~~dis~~ *de-*ference to his great reading, I am still disposed to imagine, that although others have pointed out numerous immoralities contained in the holy books, yet the instances which I *have* insisted upon are, at least some of them, new. Generally speaking, the discourses of the founder of christianity have been supposed to exhibit nothing but the purest and most

perfect morality. Whether they are *all* worthy of such an eulogy, I would request any serious and intelligent man to decide, after he has read my strictures upon two distinguished parables: which remarks I believe to be *absolutely new*; and if well-founded (as I am satisfied they are), they are of great moment.

I do not pretend that the argument is new, by which I have attempted to shew, and have, I think, shewn, that if we admit the doctrine taught both by the disciples of Christ and by Christ himself concerning the Supreme Existence, we must admit the Supreme to be (however horrible the idea) not a *good* Being, but the very *reverse*. To this argument, however, I am particularly desirous of

of

of engaging the attention of liberal christians: because they have opposed a similar one to the doctrine of Calvin. Mine is opposed to that of Christ; who, though a personage justly revered for the purity of his intentions and the ardour of his benevolence, seems, relative to the grand subject of DEITY, not to have comprehended the full import of what he himself taught.

The following argument is, I believe, a new one. I have argued that the pretensions of christianity to a heavenly and miraculous origin can have no just foundation, because it has *failed* in respect of its object. Its object is allowed to have been the reformation of the world. Now *the world has not been reformed*.

Moreover,

Moreover, whereas some of the ablest champions of christianity, are the strenuous advocates of free inquiry, and have even given us to understand that the spirit of the christian religion is a liberal spirit, and friendly to philosophical investigation; I, on the contrary, have advanced somewhat which I think is new, in order to shew that the spirit of this religion is a *slavish spirit*, and *hostile to intellectual improvement*.

But what is the spirit of our notable critic? He, like some other men, has the goodness to permit us to *think* for ourselves. Nevertheless, he insinuates that, at least, it is questionable whether a man should be left at liberty to *publish* his thoughts. And yet he, like other consistent
6 people,

people, is, I dare say, for a *free press*; and most probably would not hesitate to concede—That the proper mean of eliciting truth is *free discussion*.

As my Apology was neither advertised nor sold, and only distributed among friends and acquaintance, I did not expect that any periodical critic would honour it with his notice. If, however, the *authorised* Reviewer in the Monthly Magazine should bestow any attention upon it; in that case, it seemed to me impossible that I should meet with any other than the most liberal treatment. How much liberality is exhibited in the passage above cited let the reader judge; and, if this preface should come into the hands

hands of the editor of that valuable miscellany, let him determine how much honour is reflected upon it by such criticism.

Since the above was written, the New Annual Register for 1799 has been brought to me; and I there find it asserted, in the Review of Domestic Literature, that I have *published* an Apology, &c.

The Reviewer expresses his surprise that I should, “ even by implication, adduce the existence of the
“ African Slave Trade as an argument against christianity, because
“ it is an evil that has obtained only
“ since

“ since that religion has become
 “ known. Might he not adds the
 “ Reviewer) with equal justice allege
 “ against it every other civil and
 “ moral outrage on the rights and
 “ feelings of mankind which has
 “ originated in what is called the
 “ christian world since the reign of
 “ the emperor Constantine? Might
 “ he not, with equal fairness and
 “ weight in point of argument, as-
 “ cribe to it that disease which many
 “ writers contend the christian na-
 “ vigator Columbus imported from
 “ America?”

From hence the reader is naturally
 led to conceive that I have repre-
 sented the African slave trade as hav-
 ing originated from the christian re-
 ligion. I have done no such thing.
 But

But I have reasoned after this manner:—If the object of the Supreme Being, in sending the christian religion into the world, was the *reformation* of mankind, *i. e.* their *recovery to virtue and happiness*, the grievous and manifold evils existing in the world, since the christian æra, and that horrid enormity, the African slave trade, particularly, which, since that æra, has sprung up *in spite of the influence* of christianity, prove that the object of it has not been attained. Christianity, it has been said, was intended as a remedy to *cure* the “civil and moral outrages, &c.” which have so dreadfully prevailed: but these evils *have not been cured*. On the contrary, *peculiar evils*, of the worst description, have arisen out of *this very remedy*. Now rather than believe

believe that the Supreme Being has been thus cruelly *disappointed* in respect of his object, I am disposed to believe that he never had any such object.

The Reviewer, I dare say, will not blush for having thus misrepresented my argument. If this preface, however, should happen to fall in his way, I beg leave to assure him that, if I had undertaken to *animadvert publicly* on any production of his, or any other man's, and had done it after his [the reviewer's] fashion, it would not, I think, be possible for me to *escape my own reproaches*.

SOBER AND SERIOUS
REASONS for SCEPTICISM,
AS IT CONCERNS
REVEALED RELIGION.

IN A LETTER TO A FRIEND.

———“Of good and evil much,
“And much of mortal man my thought revolv’d.”

AKENSIDE.

ADVERTISEMENT,

Printed with the first Edition.

IT is well known, there is a description of men who have sufficient liberality to permit one to think freely on all subjects: but by them it is not permitted on all subjects to express, or, however, to *publish*, one's thoughts: and, I am afraid, some of my friends, for whom I have a great regard, belong to that class. It is their opinion, that *most* things should be brought before the public, in order to their being properly estimated: I think so of *all* things, of importance, in which the public is concerned.

DEAR SIR,

You will allow me, I am sure, the privilege of a friend, to communicate to you a matter which greatly concerns me; and I flatter myself that you will feel interested on the occasion. I will, therefore, without further preface, acquaint you that a very important alteration has taken place in my sentiments, and lay before you the considerations whereby this has been brought about.

During a course of years, my mind has been more or less affected by doubts respecting Revelation; yet they seemed to be overborne by the arguments which I was able to produce in favour of it; so that I

conceived myself to be a rational believer: but, having lately been induced to institute a new and serious inquiry, the consequence is, I find myself constrained to become a *Sceptic*.

This is certainly what I did not wish for. My prejudices seem to have lain on the side of revealed religion; and (with such ability as I had) I have endeavoured to support it. Indeed, when some persons remember me so zealous an advocate for that cause as to render my prudence questionable, they may possibly suspect me of levity. In so doing, however, they would wrong me. That which I formerly venerated as a christian, I continue still to venerate. But, whereas I formerly imagined the doctrines of christianity (without giving their express sanction) were in very good accord with those ideas of a benevolent providence, furnished by my philosophy, and I rejoiced to have my expectations of future existence confirmed

confirmed by the christian revelation—it now appears evident that the difference is irreconcilable between those doctrines and my philosophical ideas and prospects. These last are so happily and forcibly represented by Dr. Priestley, in his dedication of the Treatise on Necessity to the late Dr. Jebb, that I shall borrow what here follows. “ You and I, Sir (says Dr. P.),
“ rejoice in the belief that the whole human race are under the same *wholesome*
“ *discipline*, and that they will all certainly
“ derive the most valuable advantages
“ from it, though in different degrees, in
“ different ways, and at different periods;
“ that even the persecutors are only giving
“ the precedence to the persecuted, and
“ advancing them to a much higher degree of perfection and happiness; and
“ that they must themselves for the same
“ benevolent purpose undergo a more severe discipline than that which they are
“ the means of administering to others.”

“ With this persuasion, we cannot but
 “ consider every *being* and every *thing* in
 “ a favourable light. Every person with
 “ whom we have any connection is a *friend*,
 “ and every event in life a *benefit*; while
 “ God is equally the father and the friend
 “ of the whole creation.”

Such appeared to me to be the present condition, and such the future destiny, of human kind: and such they still appear. I mean to say, that, in my opinion, this is the most reasonable mode of explaining the phænomena of human nature, and human affairs. But, if the scriptures are to determine us, we must abandon, as altogether *visionary*, our delightful ideas and joyful expectations derived from such a benevolent constitution of things, however worthy we may deem such a constitution to be of Him who is the first, the greatest, and the best of all. In reality, what is represented in the New Testament as *the future and final destination*

destination of mankind forms a contrast with it most melancholy and distressing.—Let us appeal to what we find there, and especially to what are said to be the words of Christ himself.

In the 5th chapter of Matthew, verses 29th and 30th, the words of Jesus Christ are thus recorded: “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell. And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.”

Now, in case we should not understand what is meant by the phrase *cast into hell*, we may find the matter more fully expressed in the 18th chapter, and the 9th verse, where the phrase used is *everlasting fire*.

He

He is likewise said by Mark to have been still more explicit on the same subject. It will answer my purpose to transcribe the passage.

“ If thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it
 “ is better for thee to enter into life maim-
 “ ed, than, having two hands, to go into
 “ hell, into the fire that *never shall be*
 “ *quenched*: where their worm *dieth not*,
 “ and the fire *is not quenched*. And if thy
 “ foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better
 “ for thee to enter halt into life, than, hav-
 “ ing two feet, to be cast into hell, into the
 “ fire that *never shall be quenched*: where
 “ their worm dieth not, and the fire *is not*
 “ *quenched*. And if thine eye offend thee,
 “ pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter
 “ the kingdom of God with one eye, than,
 “ having two eyes, to be cast into hell-fire:
 “ where their worm *dieth not*, and the fire
 “ *is not quenched*. For every one shall be
 “ *salted with fire* *.”

* Mark, chap. ix.

From the account which Luke gives us, it appears, that when one inquired of Christ, Whether there were *few* to be saved? he declined giving a direct answer, by saying, “ Strive to enter in at the strait gate: “ for *many*, I say unto you, will seek to “ enter in, and shall not be able.” Nevertheless, we learn from Matthew, that he taught thus: “ Enter ye in at the strait “ gate; for wide is the gate and broad is “ the way that leadeth to *destruction*, and “ *many* there be which go in thereat: be- “ cause strait is the gate and narrow is “ the way which leadeth unto life, and *few* “ there be that find it.” Let us now turn to that remarkable prayer of Christ, which we find in the 17th chapter of John, and in which are the following expressions: “ The men which thou gavest me *out of* “ *the world*—I pray for *them*: I pray *not* “ for *the world*.” Agreeably to this distinction, John says, near the conclusion of his first epistle, “ We know that *we* are of “ God,

“ God, and *the whole world lieth in wickedness.*” And, in perfect harmony with John, Paul says to the Corinthians, “ We are *chastened* of the Lord, that we should not be *condemned with the world* *.”

I might have added more quotations to the same effect: but I think it is sufficiently evident what is *the destination of mankind* according to the account given in the New Testament: and it seems a very natural reflection, that, if this be the true account, what was affirmed of Judas Iscariot might, with as much reason, be predicated of *all men* (the little flock of true christians excepted), viz. *It were good for them not to have been, or not to be, born.* Indeed I suspect that the best and most intelligent christians have attended to this subject very reluctantly. Some have taken great pains to aggravate what are called the *demerits* of men, in order to vindicate the

* 1 Cor. xi. 32.

ways of God; and others, being unable to endure the thought of *eternal* punishment, have (with the best intentions, and because their intentions were so good) cheated themselves into the belief that the future punishments of the christian religion were only *temporary*. However, if we should suppose the human race to be destined by their Maker to exist in a state of misery during a term of *a hundred thousand years*, and, at the end of that term, that both their misery and their existence should *cease*: although the fate of mankind would then indeed be infinitely less dreadful, the difficulty would not be removed.

There is, I imagine, in this country, at present, a very considerable number of serious and reflecting christians, who have embraced the philosophical doctrine of necessity. And (as what we wish to be true, we are more or less prepared to admit upon insufficient evidence) these persons,

fons, seeing the very happy and desirable consequences resulting from that doctrine in conjunction with the belief of a perfect Deity, because they *wished* it, seem to have persuaded themselves that they have actually *found* their philosophical doctrine in the books of scripture. Or else, perhaps, they have conceived that, by applying the philosophical theory, they can solve difficulties, which occur in those books, not solvable by any other process. The misfortune is, *the theory will not apply.*

The scriptural doctrines of the divine fore-knowledge, and of a scheme of providence, which, while comprehending the general affairs of the world, is represented as extending likewise to the concerns of each individual, *coincide* very well with the philosophical doctrine of necessity. But nothing can be more *repugnant* to it than what the scriptures teach us concerning *punishments*, especially *never-ending punishments*,

ments, and the *demerits* of all mankind (except the *few* who enter in at the strait gate), which, according to the scriptures, render those punishments proper, and, as it should seem, even necessary, to be inflicted on them by a just and righteous God.

It seems natural enough for a benevolent necessarian to consider those passages of scripture, where the benevolence of the Deity is mentioned, as perfectly consonant with his philosophy. They are so in reality. But this will never shew that the happy *results* of his philosophy have *the scriptural sanction*. On the other hand, those explicit declarations of Christ, relative to future punishment, together with the other passages equally explicit, above cited, are totally adverse and irreconcilable. And, in my apprehension, they are no more capable of being reconciled to that character of benevolence which *every christian*, whether a necessarian or no, ascribes to God.

There

There is scarcely any christian who would deny the *foreknowledge* of God, although he should believe the *free will* of man. But, should he, at the same time, believe also the doctrine of *eternal punishment*, it would not be possible for him to withhold his assent to the following proposition: That the Creator, when he gave existence to human beings, endowed them with a power whereby, he *certainly knew*, they would make themselves *eternally miserable*. Indeed the scriptural account of the *final destination* of the human race appears to me *shocking* (as I should think it would to any considerate man), not only when contemplated as it is simply in itself, but because it impresses on the mind such an idea of the conduct of Almighty God as goes to the annihilation of his moral attributes.

All those who, holding man to be a free agent, a self-determined being, think that his sins *require* punishment to follow them,

and that they ought not *in justice* to go *unpunished*, do nevertheless, I presume, judge that the *punishment* ought to be *proportionate* to the *offence*.

Others, again, who describe human nature in the same way, think that, where the power and wisdom of Government are adequate to the purpose, *all* punishment ought to be so applied as that, while it operates for an *example*, it should *reform* the offender.

But, as for me, who am thoroughly convinced that, agreeably to the philosophical doctrine of necessity, every man is what he is, *inevitably*, in consequence of that situation and those circumstances which have been assigned him by his Maker,—how can I reflect, without *horror*, on what has been adduced from the christian scriptures relative to the future and final condition of mankind, if I preserve the least veneration

for that which is indeed infinitely venerable—the *character of Deity*?

Every man (in what way soever he came by them) is possessed of the ideas of *justice* and *benevolence*. He esteems his fellow man who is just and benevolent to be a good character; and he cannot help so doing. And if he could believe in a God who was not just and benevolent, he could not esteem such a being to be a good character if he would. If he is upright, he judges of those around him by the apostolical maxim, “He that doeth righteousness is righteous.” And any just idea he can form of his Maker’s moral character must be formed in the same way. Let any person, then, suppose the scriptural account of the final destination of mankind to be such as I think I have shewn it to be. In that case he must either admit the account to be false, or he must own, I apprehend, that the scriptural Deity is not a
just

just and benevolent being. For my part, I am persuaded that it is the true scriptural account; but I am, at least, equally persuaded, for I am well convinced, that it is *in itself false*. This, dear Sir, is my grand objection to christianity, and the principal ground of my scepticism: I have therefore naturally mentioned it first. My mind, however, is much impressed by the history of *the extermination of the Canaanites*: and, moreover, I cannot help thinking, that the very notion of Miracles and Revelation is attended with much difficulty.

I am sensible that these my two remaining objections, of which I am about to speak, are far from being new: but the question is,—Have they ever received a satisfactory reply? The first of them, I think, certainly has not: especially since I have had the pleasure of reading the letters addressed to Thomas Paine by the learned and ingenious Bishop of Landaff. His

Lordship expresses his astonishment that so acute a reasoner, as Mr. Paine, should attempt to disparage the Bible by bringing forward this exploded and frequently refuted objection of Morgan, Tindal, and Bolingbroke. Nevertheless, he has taken considerable pains to produce another refutation. In my opinion, however, he has failed: and I will now give you the reasons on which that opinion is founded. But previously I shall make the following extract from his Lordship's first letter.

"You profess yourself" (says his Lordship) "to be a deist, and to believe that
 "there is a God, who created the universe,
 "and established the laws of nature by
 "which it is sustained in existence. You
 "profess that from the contemplation of
 "the works of God, you derive a know-
 "ledge of his attributes; and you reject
 "the Bible, because it ascribes to God
 "things inconsistent (as you suppose) with
 "the attributes which you have discover-

“ ed to belong to him ; in particular, you
“ think it repugnant to his moral justice,
“ that he should doom to destruction the
“ crying or the smiling infants of the Ca-
“ naanites.—Why do you not maintain it
“ to be repugnant to his moral justice, that
“ he should suffer crying or smiling in-
“ fants to be swallowed up by an earth-
“ quake, drowned by an inundation, con-
“ sumed by a fire, starved by a famine, or
“ destroyed by a pestilence? The word of
“ God is in perfect harmony with his
“ work ; crying or smiling infants are sub-
“ jected to death in both. We believe
“ that the earth, at the express command
“ of God, opened her mouth and swallow-
“ ed up Korah, Dathan, and Abiram,
“ with their wives, their sons, and their
“ little ones. This you esteem so repug-
“ nant to God’s moral justice, that you
“ spurn, as spurious, the book in which
“ the circumstance is related. When Ca-
“ tania, Lima, and Lisbon, were severally
C 3 “ destroyed

“ destroyed by earthquakes, men with
 “ their wives, their sons, and their little
 “ ones, were swallowed up alive:—why
 “ do you not spurn, as spurious, the book
 “ of nature, in which this fact is certainly
 “ written, and from the perusal of which
 “ you infer the moral justice of God?
 “ You will, probably, reply, that the evils,
 “ which the Canaanites suffered from the
 “ express command of God, were different
 “ from those which are brought on man-
 “ kind by the operation of the laws of na-
 “ ture.—Different! in what?—Not in
 “ the magnitude of the evil—not in the
 “ subjects of sufferance—not in the author
 “ of it—for my philosophy, at least, in-
 “ structs me to believe that God not only
 “ primarily formed, but that he hath
 “ through all ages executed the laws of
 “ nature; and that he will through all eter-
 “ nity administer them, for the general
 “ happiness of his creatures, whether we
 “ can, on every occasion, discern that end
 “ or not.

“ I am far from being guilty of the im-
 “ piety of questioning the existence of the
 “ moral justice of God, as proved either
 “ by natural or revealed religion; what I
 “ contend for is shortly this—that you
 “ have no right, in fairness of reasoning,
 “ to urge any apparent deviation from
 “ moral justice as an argument against re-
 “ vealed religion, because you do not urge
 “ an equally apparent deviation from it as
 “ an argument against natural religion:
 “ you reject the former and admit the
 “ latter, without adverting that they must
 “ stand, or fall together *.”

Forbearing to make any comment on
 the style of the paragraphs I have quoted,
 I take the liberty to observe, that when
 his Lordship would prove there is *no* dif-
 ference between the destruction resulting
 from a *natural event* and the destruction
executed by the hands of the Israelites at the

* See Letters to T. Paine, pages 14, 15, 16,
 17, 18.

command of God, and when he, for that end, enumerates several circumstances in which these two things *agree*, he omits one, and that an important one, in which they will be found to *differ essentially*. Admitting God to be the author of both, no man can truly affirm the *intention* to have been *the same* in both cases, till he shall be intitled to affirm that Calamity and Punishment are *synonymous*. But all men consent to *distinguish* between these things. That there are natural punishments I will not deny. When the conscience of our third royal Richard found him out, and the horrible spectres, of those who had fallen victims to his cruel tyranny, presented themselves to his imagination*, he may be said to have endured, not merely a calamity, but a natural punishment. When the plague destroyed the good Howard, the philanthropist, at Cherson, it was not a punish-

* Whether this be literally the historical truth is of no importance to my argument.

ment, but a sad calamity. And it is worthy of our consideration, that it is recorded, when a notorious calamity befel some Galileans, and another similar matter happened to certain persons at Jerusalem, Christ put the question—Think ye that these men were sinners above other men? and answered it himself thus, “I tell you, *no*.” In which determination two opinions seem to be signified: first, that calamity is *not* punishment; and, secondly, that all just punishment implies *sin* or *crime* in the subject of it. Indeed, I am persuaded that both are perfectly agreeable to the general apprehensions of mankind: for no one, till his ideas of *right* and *wrong* were confounded, and till he had “put *evil* for *good*, and *good* for *evil*,” ever thought that the *righteous*, or the *innocent*, were the *proper subjects* of *punishment*.

Now what is the conduct ascribed to God in the scripture history, and defended with

with so much zeal by the learned prelate? It is precisely this, that he inflicted the punishment of death on the *innocent infants* of the Canaanites. The extermination is represented as a signal and terrible punishment. But, whatever we may think of the parents, it *could not* have been deserved by the *innocent infants*. With respect to these last, therefore, it *could not* be other than an *unjust* punishment.

Calamity, as such, is *not* punishment, unless every calamity, great or small, is so, whereby either men or brute animals are afflicted: Therefore, though the all-wise Author of nature might see fit that the inhabitants of Lima, Catania, and Lisbon, should perish by earthquakes, it does not follow that he inflicted punishment on them: Therefore those cases were *different* from the case of the extermination of the Canaanites.

If, however, for the sake of argument, we should grant that there was *no* difference, and that those natural calamities were real punishment, and should apologise for the *innocent* having been included with the *guilty* in the same punishment, by alleging the *impossibility* of distinguishing them without a miracle:—the same apology could not be made for punishing the Canaanitish Infants; because it was very *easy* to distinguish *them*.

The Bishop, in the next page, remarks that “He (God) made the Israelites the
“executors of his vengeance; and in doing this he gave such an evident and
“terrible proof of his abomination of vice,
“as could not fail to strike the surrounding nations with astonishment and terror,
“and to impress on the minds of the Israelites what they were to expect, if they
“followed the example of the nations
“whom he commanded them to cut off.”

Now

Now I think, indeed, the minds of that people would be very strongly impressed by being made the executors of such dreadful vengeance: but I cannot help thinking, too, that the impression would be very pernicious. By learning that it belonged to the character of the Governor and the Judge of the world *to inflict cruel and unjust punishment*, they would not be inspired with veneration for that supreme Governor and Judge. And it is hard to persuade one that the staining their hands in the blood of infants was likely to teach them humanity. In reality, it does not appear, from their history, that they possessed much of either: and it is particularly worthy of notice, that they were not even preserved from the very worst crimes of the exterminated nations.

It is painful to reflect that men should ever have been led to imagine, whilst habituated to the practice of atrocious injustice,

tice, they might plead both the *authority* and *example* of that great Being whom they acknowledged as their maker, and, likewise, as their Governor and Judge. Deplorable indeed must have been the circumstances of those men: and it is difficult to conceive any circumstances more naturally fitted to generate the most horrid species of depravity.

Such are my reasons for thinking the Bishop of Landaff has not succeeded in his attempt to refute an objection which in my mind is a very serious one, and likely to remain so.

It seems impossible to conceive how any order for extermination should proceed from the just and benevolent Deity: but that which respects the Amalekites, delivered by Samuel, in the name of God, to Saul, is more extraordinary than that concerning the other nations. It is as follows:

lows: “ Thus saith the Lord of hosts, I
 “ remember that which Amalek did to Is-
 “ rael, how he laid wait for him in the
 “ way when he came up from Egypt.
 “ Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly
 “ destroy all that they have, and spare
 “ them not; but slay both *man* and *woman*,
 “ *infant* and *suckling*, ox and sheep, camel
 “ and ass*.” Now it is observable, that
 this order does not make the *wickedness* of
 the Amalekites the reason of their destruc-
 tion; but the charge (though not literally
 so expressed) seems to be in effect this,
That they took up arms against their invaders.
 It may be observed, likewise, that *the gene-*
ration of men who had done this was *passed*
away: and *all* of those, for whom this hor-
 rible massacre was decreed, were as *innocent*
 of the charge as the *infants* and *sucklings*.
 The history of the offence is recorded in
 the 17th chapter of Exodus: and at the
 end of that chapter we are told, “ The

* 1 Sam. xv. 2, 3.

“ Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a
“ memorial in a book, and rehearse it in
“ the ears of Joshua; for I will *utterly put*
“ *out the remembrance of Amalek from under*
“ *heaven.* And Moses built an altar,
“ and called the name of it JEHOVAH-
“ nissi: for he said, Because the Lord hath
“ sworn, *that the Lord will have war with*
“ *Amalek from generation to generation.*”

We need not, surely, to be surprised that the jewish people have been characterised by the qualities of cruelty and malice. Nevertheless, we find these qualities appearing sometimes where one would not expect it:—we find them in their *devotions*.

It is universally admitted that, in the book of *Psalms*, there are many compositions of unrivalled excellence in their kind. The divine providence and goodness are celebrated there in strains of poetry admirably

rably sublime, and powerfully affecting, which seem expressive of feelings truly devout, and adapted to call forth similar feelings. There are passages, however, that occur in this book, at which I am astonished; but the feeling excited has nothing *pleasurable* belonging to it. The very writer who, at one time, praises God because
 “ he is gracious and full of compassion,
 “ slow to anger and of great mercy; be-
 “ cause he is good to all, and his tender
 “ mercies are over all his works *;”—the very same writer, in an address to that same God, whose goodness he has thus celebrated, uses the following expressions relative to his own personal enemies: “ Let
 “ their table become a snare before them,
 “ and that which should have been for
 “ their welfare, let it become a trap! *Let*
 “ *their eyes be darkened that they see not,* and
 “ make their loins continually to shake!
 “ Pour out thine indignation upon them,

* See Psalm cxlv.

“ and let thy wrathful anger take hold of
“ them! Let their habitation be desolate,
“ and let none dwell in their tents *!” On
another occasion, we have these horrid
imprecations of the same writer upon his
enemy: “ When he shall be judged, let
“ him be condemned, and let his prayer
“ become sin! Let his days be few, and
“ let another take his office! *Let his chil-*
“ *dren be fatherless and his wife a widow!*
“ *Let his children be continually vagabonds,*
“ *and beg: let them seek their bread out of*
“ *their desolate places!* Let the extortioner
“ catch all that he hath; and let the stran-
“ ger spoil his labour! *Let there be none to*
“ *extend mercy unto him, neither let there be*
“ *any to favour his fatherless children!* Let
“ his posterity be cut off, and, in the ge-
“ neration following, let his name be blot-
“ ted out! *Let the iniquity of his father be*
“ *remembered with the Lord; and let not the*

* See Psalm lxi.

“ *sin of his mother be blotted out !* Let them
 “ be before the Lord continually, that he
 “ may cut off the memory of them from
 “ the earth ! because that he remembered
 “ not to shew mercy ; but persecuted the
 “ poor and needy man [the imprecator
 “ himself], that he might even slay the
 “ broken in heart. As he loved cursing,
 “ so let it come unto him ! As he delight-
 “ ed not in blessing, so let it be far from
 “ him ! As he clothed himself with curs-
 “ ing as with a garment, so let it come
 “ into his bowels like water, and like oil
 “ into his bones ! Let it be unto him as
 “ the garment which covereth him, and
 “ for a girdle wherewith he is girded con-
 “ tinually ! Let this be the reward of *my*
 “ *adversaries* from the Lord* !”——We
 have got, I presume, a sufficient specimen
 of one kind of devotional spirit. But as
 the writer was a writer of celebrity with
 his countrymen, he must have found among

* See Psalm cix.

them a *congenial* spirit. I hope and believe it was never found any where else.

There was one more objection, mentioned above, respecting the difficulty attending the very notion of Miracles and Revelation.

When I was very young, and as yet *totally ignorant* of what philosophers have discovered concerning the immense system of the universe, and the laws of the material world,—this difficulty did not at all affect me. But at present it seems to me, as it has long seemed, to be a thing, if not absolutely incredible, very hard to believe, that the venerable Author of universal nature, after having established the general order, and the laws by which all natural events are brought to pass, should find it necessary to *break in* upon that order and those laws for the accomplishment of his designs. Moreover, since I became a ne-

cessarian, the difficulty has not been diminished by my conviction that the mind is subject to laws as certain as the laws of gravitation, and that events take place as regularly in the intellectual and moral, as in the material world.

Indeed I am not quite so averse to admit some *grand interference* for a very extraordinary purpose, as to receive the account of the many particular miracles recorded in the scripture history.

The idea of God, in most men's minds, is a very different thing from that conceived by a philosopher habituated to contemplate the universe. What can such a contemplative man think, when he reads of personal visits from the infinite and eternal Deity to the man Abraham, and the colloquial discourse which passed on those occasions? Let any reflecting person read what is related, in the 20th chapter of Genesis,

Genesis, concerning Abraham, Sarah, and Abimelech the king of Gerar; and the account of what God is represented as speaking, in a vision, to Abimelech; likewise the account of the miraculous punishment inflicted on the female part of Abimelech's family; and then let him declare soberly how he is impressed by the narrative. I am no scoffer: but I do not wonder at Mr. Voltaire's scoffing. Independently, however, of the objection to this story and the morality of it, can it appear at all probable that such personal conferences should have taken place between *the Author of the universe* and *Abraham* or *Moses* as those related? I inquire not how probable such things may be in the estimation of ordinary men, but in that of intelligent and reflecting persons.

There is what, I think, will illustrate the matter, in a volume of letters, addressed to various persons, by Dr. Priest-

ley*. Among the rest, there are twelve very excellent ones to the late Dr. Price; in one of which, on the antecedent probability of the Arian hypothesis, we meet with these following observations :

“ That *mere divines* should talk so lightly as they sometimes do, concerning *creation*, and the possibility of its falling within the province of an inferior being, I do not wonder ; because they have no proper idea of what creation is or implies. They have no conception of the magnitude of it, or of the wonderful extent of the laws by which the mundane system is governed. But you, Sir, are not a mere divine. You rank high in the class of mathematicians and natural philosophers, who are daily contemplating, and making farther inquiries into, the laws of nature ; who are filled with

* The title is, *Letters to Dr. Horne, to the Young Men of Oxford and Cambridge, to Dr Price, and to Mr. Packhurst.* Published by Johnson, 1787.

“ astonishment

“astonishment at what they do see of them,
“and who are at the same time well satisf-
“fied that all they see bears no sensible
“proportion to that which is unknown.

“Now that a being possessing the pro-
“found wisdom, and astonishing power,
“that must have been necessary to the
“construction of such a system as this
“ (even allowing the *matter* out of which it
“was made to have been prepared for
“him), should become a child in the
“womb of a woman, be born, be brought
“up from infancy to manhood, be subject
“to all the pains and infirmities of men,
“be delivered into the hands of his ene-
“mies, be crucified, and die, appears to
“me to be in reality no less incredible
“than it does to you that the creator of
“*all* worlds should be thus degraded.”

I do not say, you will observe, that the
instances which the scripture history affords

of colloquial discourse between *the Author of nature* and *Abraham*, and between the same *infinite and astonishing Being* and *Moses*, are *parallel* instances of degradation; they, nevertheless, appear so degrading as to render the history *antecedently improbable*: and, indeed, I think that any accounts of miraculous interposition must appear so, even to persons whose minds are strongly impressed with religion, provided it be a rational and not a superstitious religion; and provided the persons in question be acquainted with the great laws of nature, and attentive to the events constantly taking place according to the established order. I have certainly no pretensions to the character of a profound philosopher; but, beholding, every day, and seriously contemplating, as I do, the regular way in which the Author of nature brings his designs to pass, to me it appears an *unnatural thing* to suppose him *deviating* from his eternal course.

Yet

Yet I mean to say no more than that such miraculous interposition is *antecedently improbable*; I do not affirm it to be *absolutely incredible*.

After all, I am ready to acknowledge that I feel the force of the argument, for the truth of the christian revelation, derived from the *testimony* of the apostles taken together with their subsequent conduct, and the persecutions which they thereby knowingly incurred. If the christian miracles were not true (and if the apostles were, as they are supposed to have been, competent to judge of that matter), their conduct is altogether unaccountable; and the rapid success of christianity is equally so.

This argument has been repeatedly urged by Dr. Priestley, and recently by the bishop of Landaff*; more especially it has

* See his Two Sermons, and a Charge to his Clergy.
Published by Evans.

been stated and enforced with great ability by Mr. Paley; whose work, I imagine, is considered as the completest defence of christianity in the English language. This argument likewise seems, in the opinion of those writers, to be the strong ground on which christianity stands. But I would inquire, Can it support the truth of the christian revelation, without sanctioning the morality of the Old and New Testaments? Or may we receive the revelation of *a future state* on the authority of this argument, and be at liberty to reject *the morality* taught in those books, the whole or any part of it, if it should appear to us to be false and pernicious morality? These questions, I apprehend, will be *negatived* by every christian.

But though I should concede that, on the supposition of christianity being *false*, both the conduct of the apostles and the rapid success of christianity are *unaccountable*:

able: What then? In the present case, as in many others, I must acquiesce in my ignorance and inability. At the same time I may be allowed to assert, That no argument can prove that to be true which in itself is impossible. Now I am convinced it is impossible for the benevolent Deity to create beings in order to make them miserable: but the christian scriptures affirm (as we have seen) that everlasting misery is *the destination of the great mass of human beings*; which is affirming, in other words, that the benevolent Deity hath actually done this horrible thing*.

It

* In Dr. Priestley's *Institutes of Natural and Revealed Religion*, 2 vols. 8vo, pages 271, 272, of vol. i. we have these remarkable concessions: "It is readily acknowledged that many propositions are, in their own nature, absurd; and, therefore, that no evidence whatever can be of any avail to the proof of them. If, for instance, a person should do what I should not be able to distinguish from a real miracle, pretending to prove by it
" that

It is generally understood, I believe, that the great object of the christian revelation was to establish the doctrine of a future state. Mr. Paley says, " If I were to de-

" that the sun did not rise yesterday, to contradict
 " such a notorious historical fact as, there is such a
 " place as Rome, or to refute so plain a proposition
 " as this, that 2 and 2 make 4, he will not persuade
 " me to admit any thing so contrary to experience,
 " to common sense, or to unquestionable human
 " testimony. Also, the great outlines of natural
 " religion, respecting the providence and goodness
 " of God, and the great rules of human duty,
 " though they be not strictly demonstrable, yet
 " their very high degree of probability, and their
 " great importance to mankind, give them such a
 " sanction, that *we ought not to listen to any evidence*
 " *that would tend to undermine them.* We may take
 " it for granted that God cannot *contradict* himself.
 " Whatever, therefore, he clearly appears to be in
 " his works, we may assure ourselves that he will
 " also appear to be in any revelation that he shall
 " please to make of himself. He cannot appear
 " *good and merciful* in one method of making him-
 " self known, and *cruel and unjust* in another."

" scribe,

“ scribe, in a very few words, the scope
 “ of christianity as a *revelation*, I should
 “ say that it was, to influence the conduct
 “ of human life, by establishing the proof
 “ of a future state of rewards and punish-
 “ nishments—to bring life and immorta-
 “ lity to light*.” Christians, therefore,
 who, as such, are believers in a future
 state, should take their ideas of that state
 from THE REPRESENTATIONS of
 it given in the NEW TESTAMENT.
 Now those representations, I think, cannot
 be true : and, as far as the great body of
 mankind is concerned, they have no rea-
 son to wish them to be so. If, indeed, it
 were the doctrine of Christ—That *the pre-*
sent is a state of discipline, to prepare men
 for happiness in *a future state*, by making
 them virtuous here ; or if, as we unfor-
 tunately see the many do not become vir-
 tuous here, Christ had taught us that they

* See Paley’s View of the Evidences of Chris-
 tianity, 8vo edition, 1796, pp. 24, 25.

must undergo *a future discipline*; but that, ultimately, they will attain to virtue and happiness:—a future state, so represented, would be *a desirable thing*. But, alas! *punishment*, in scripture, is always described, *not* as a *benevolent discipline**, to the generality of mankind, but as the execution of *just vengeance*: agreeably to what occurs in the following passage, taken from Paul's 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians, chap. i.

“It is *a righteous thing* with God to re-
 “compense tribulation to them that trou-
 “ble you, and to you, who are troubled,
 “rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall
 “be revealed from heaven, with his migh-

* I am sufficiently aware that the writer to the Hebrews (chap. xii.) represents the evils of life as answering the end of a salutary discipline to sincere and pious christians, but not to other men. “Whom
 “the Lord *loveth* he *chasteneth*,” says that writer; who is supposed to have been that same Paul who tells the Corinthians (as above mentioned), “We
 “are *chastened* of the Lord that we should not be
 “condemned with the world.”

“ ty angels, in flaming fire, *taking ven-*
 “ *geance* on them that know not God, and
 “ that obey not the gospel of our Lord
 “ Jesus Christ: who shall be punished
 “ with *everlasting destruction* from the pre-
 “ sence of the Lord and from the glory of
 “ his power.”

Nevertheless, it is my sincere opinion,
 that a purer, a more dignified, or a more
 amiable religion was never exhibited to
 the sons of men, than we find in what is
 called the Lord's prayer, in the parable
 of the prodigal, and other parts of Christ's
 discourses: for instance, his affecting ad-
 dress to his hearers on the subject of *anx-*
iety, which I will transcribe. “ I say unto
 “ you, take no thought for your life, what
 “ ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor
 “ yet for your body, what ye shall put on.
 “ Is not the life more than meat, and the
 “ body than raiment? Behold the fowls
 “ of the air: for they sow not, neither do
 I “ they

“ they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet
“ your *heavenly Father* feedeth them. Are
“ not ye much better than they ? Which
“ of you, by taking thought [by his anx-
“ iety], can add one cubit unto his stature ?
“ And why take ye thought for raiment ?
“ Consider the lilies of the field, how they
“ grow : they toil not, neither do they
“ spin : and yet, I say unto you, that even
“ Solomon, in all his glory, was not ar-
“ rayed like one of these. Wherefore, if
“ God so clothe the grass of the field,
“ which to-day is, and to-morrow is cast
“ into the oven, shall he not much more
“ clothe you, O ye of little faith ? There-
“ fore, take no [anxious] thought, say-
“ ing, What shall we eat ? or what shall
“ we drink ? or, wherewithal shall we be
“ clothed ? for your *heavenly Father* know-
“ eth that ye have need of all these things.
“ But seek ye first the kingdom of God,
“ and his righteousness, and all these things
“ shall be added unto you.”

As

As another instance, I will transcribe his exhortation to *pray*.—"Ask, and
"it shall be given you: seek, and ye shall
"find: knock, and it shall be opened unto
"you: For every one that asketh, re-
"ceiveth; and he, that seeketh, findeth;
"and, to him that knocketh, it shall be
"opened.

"Or what man is there of you, of
"whom if his son ask bread, will he give
"him a stone? or, if he ask a fish, will he
"give him a serpent?

"If ye then, being evil, know how to
"give good gifts unto your children, how
"much more shall your *heavenly Father*
"give good things to them that ask
"him *?"

The benevolent morality, likewise, in-

* See Matthew, chap. vi. and vii.

culcated by Christ, is truly admirable. A better specimen cannot be given than we have in that beautiful and interesting apologue of the man travelling to Jericho, who fell into the hands of robbers*: which I forbear to transcribe. I cannot, however, avoid remarking the divine simplicity of the doctrine which resolves the whole of religion and morality into, those grand principles, the *love of God*, and the *love of man*.

From what has been adduced, it appears that both the *sentiments* and the *doctrines* of scripture are *discordant* in the extreme. A wise man will therefore *discriminate*. He will endeavour to “prove
“all things, and hold fast that which is
“good.” But, unfortunately, what is most *obnoxious* appears to me *inseparably connected* with the doctrine which is acknowledg-

* See Luke, chap. x.

ed to be the *grand article* of the christian revelation ; and therefore appears to have all the support which the *miraculous authority* can afford it. However, though I own myself unable to refute the argument brought to prove that authority to be real, I am convinced that the doctrine, which represents the *benevolent Deity* as having created beings *in order to make them miserable*, can never have the *seal of his authority*.

When I seriously consider this *principal objection*, likewise that similar one respecting the *extermination of the Canaanites* ; and, lastly, that grounded on the *antecedent improbability* of all revelation ; I perceive myself, as I said, *constrained* to become a *Sceptic*. Because I would not do a rash thing, I do not pronounce the revelations (as they are styled) of the Old and New Testaments to be false : but I am very far indeed from believing them to be true.

In this state of mind, and at my time of life, it is probable that my habits and my conduct will remain nearly such as they have been. With respect to one article, nevertheless, I shall cease to do as I have done. I shall no longer (at least till I am better informed) by a solemn and public act declare myself to be a christian: because I would not do it, either by word or deed, in private conversation. Yet I am not aware of any thing which should hinder me from rejoicing in the fatherly goodness of God; I know of nothing which should hinder me from contemplating, with delight, his benevolent providence, without which “not a sparrow falls to the ground;” or even from lifting up my heart to him, with humble confidence, as to the original and genuine source of all that is excellent and good. Perhaps, too, my christian friends will permit me, when the melancholy scenes of human calamity force my attention, to console myself with the reviving hope

———“ That

———" That this dark state,
" In wayward passions lost and vain pursuits,
" This *infancy* of being, cannot prove,
" The *final issue* of the works of God."

THOMSON.

I have now, my dear Sir, finished what
I had to say to you: and, leaving you to
judge of it,

I remain

Yours affectionately,

J. H.



AN APOLOGY

FOR THE DISBELIEF

OF

REVEALED RELIGION:

BEING

A SEQUEL

TO

SOBER AND SERIOUS REASONS

FOR

SCEPTICISM, &c.



ADVERTISEMENT,

Printed with the first Edition.

THE writer of the ensuing pages has therein asserted (intentionally at least) the cause of religious truth; and, *so far*, presumes, that he has concurred with liberal christians, who, he trusts, will judge him with candour, or, at least, with equity. But he will own that, having differed on a subject of great importance from a number of his friends, it has, likewise, been his object to vindicate more fully this part of his conduct, and to preserve as much of their esteem as may be. It is meant, indeed, that what he has written shall go principally among those friends.

AN
A P O L O G Y, &c.

WHEN the advocates of revealed religion make demands upon us for our faith, it seems very natural, in this age of free inquiry and discussion, for a thoughtful man to reflect on the matter or matters which we are required to believe. “ I find myself (such a man may say) situated, as I conceive, in the midst of the UNIVERSE of God. I contemplate the phenomena *around me*, and perceive nothing at rest; but the grand succession of events which fall under my notice, takes place uniformly and regularly, according to established laws, from the revolution of the heavenly bodies, to the change of seasons upon this earthly globe,
“ and

“ and to the circulation of the blood in an
“ animal system. From what I experi-
“ ence *within me*, I am convinced that
“ mind is governed by laws as incontroul-
“ able as the laws of matter; because I am
“ invariably determined to action by the
“ strongest motive, and I cannot doubt
“ that other men are determined in the
“ same manner. All things, therefore,
“ which come to pass were, I conclude,
“ ordained by, and spring from, the opera-
“ tion of that original Cause, the wise
“ and benevolent Author of the universe;
“ who, being perfectly acquainted with
“ individual and universal nature, knew
“ from everlasting how to dispose properly
“ of every being and every thing, and to
“ what influences it was proper to subject
“ them, in order to produce the proposed
“ result, viz. the *greatest sum of good*. As
“ a true Theist, it is thus I conceive of
“ the Deity exerting his power agreeably
“ to established and invariable laws: for
“ *with*

“with him is no variableness or shadow of
“turning.”

It seems impossible to consider this great Being as accomplishing his purpose by this uniform and invariable mode of operation, without apprehending it to be the most dignified mode, and perfectly suitable to his character: and, on the other hand, it seems likewise impossible to contemplate him as *deviating* from this mode so simple and sublime, and as *disturbing his own established order* by working *miracles*, without esteeming such a *deviation* to be a thing derogatory from him, because implying a *defect* of wisdom or of power. But however unworthy of him such a *deviation* may appear, it is what all the advocates of revelation contend for, and require us to believe. Indeed, there is a great difference between the opinions of some and others of them, respecting the *extent* to which the miraculous power has been exerted;

erted; some thinking all the miraculous stories in the Old Testament to be true, and deeming all the scriptural books, without exception, to have the divine sanction and authority; while others think a number of those stories to be fabulous, and entirely disbelieve the inspiration of the greatest part of scripture.

It has been the general opinion among christians that, in the scriptures, the Deity has revealed to mankind the knowledge of himself and of his providential government, and likewise the knowledge of true and genuine morality. And it is remarkable that those christians who have believed *least* respecting inspiration, have joined with those who have believed *most* in extolling scriptural religion and morality as far the purest and the best, and in defending the sacred books when censured for containing both doctrines and examples of irreligion and immorality.

Whether any unprejudiced person could remain unconvinced of the justice of such a charge after reading those books, I will not determine: but surely prejudice itself must admit it to be an extraordinary circumstance that the noble Lord presiding in the Court of King's-Bench should, on a recent occasion*, have doubted whether he ought to keep his seat in that court while Mr. Stewart Kyd read passages from the Holy Bible. His lordship, indeed, objected to the reading *parts* of the Bible. But though it is true that detached parts of a connected dissertation may convey a meaning very different from what the writer intended, this observation (as every one must see) does not affect entire and unmutilated narratives, such as those in question, references to which I shall put in the note subjoined †.

But,

* The trial of Williams for publishing the Age of Reason, 24th of June, 1797.

† The censurable passages, as Mr. Kyd understood

But, what must be a most important consideration to a *religious* man, in those books

stood them to be, consist of obscene stories, with which he has joined Solomon's famous Song as an instance of voluptuous debauchery: they consist, likewise, of instances of cruel and torturous executions and unrelenting vindictiveness. Relations of the first sort (though certainly not all equally liable to objection) he merely cited, as

The story of Sarah's giving Hagar to Abraham, Gen. ch. xvi.

The transaction of Lot's two daughters with their father, Gen. ch. xix.

The disputes of Rachel and Leah about the possession of Jacob's person, and their giving each her handmaid to Jacob, Gen. ch. xxx.

The history of the rape of Dinah, Gen. ch. xxxiv.

The story of Judah and Tamar, Gen. ch. xxxviii.

The solicitation of Joseph by Potiphar's wife, Gen. ch. xxxix.

The story of Zimri, and Cosbi the Midianitish woman, Numb. ch. xxv.

———— of Samson and Delilah, Judges, ch. xvi.

———— of the Levites' concubine abused by the Gibeathites, Judges, ch. xix.

———— of Abigail, the wife of Nabal, becoming the wife of David, 1 Sam. ch. xxv.

The

books we find a representation not merely unworthy and degrading, but an impious represent-

The story of Ammon, one of the sons of David, debauching Tamar, the sister of Absalom, another of David's sons, 2 Sam. ch. xiii.

———— of the same Absalom debauching his father's concubines in the face of all Israel, on the house-top, 2 Sam. ch. xvi.

———— of David and Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, 2 Sam. ch. xi.

Mr. Kyd said, he forbore to read these stories at length, because he felt it his duty to spare the modesty of an English audience : for the same reason he did not read, but refer to the Song of Solomon : but with respect to the instances of cruel and torturous execution, and unrelenting vindictiveness, he did not feel himself restrained, and the narratives of these he proposed to read, when Lord Kenyon interfered : and the jury not wishing to hear them, Mr. K. cited the passages as they follow :

The story of the treacherous and cruel revenge of the two sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, on the Shechemites, Gen. ch. xxxiv.

The history of the slaughter of the Midianites, Numb. ch. xxxi.

The slaughter of the Canaanites by the com-

representation of the eternal Deity. The more liberal christians, when speaking of

mand of God ; particularly the conduct of Joshua to the men of Ai, Josh. ch. viii. and the slaughter of the five kings, Josh. ch. x.

The story of Sisera and Jael, and the Song of Deborah and Barak in exultation at the event, Judges, ch. iv. and v.

The murder of the people of Jabesh Gilead, for not having gone up with the rest of the tribes against Benjamin, in the case of the Levite's concubine, Judges, ch. xxi.

The account of Samuel hewing Agag in pieces before the Lord in Gilgal, 1 Sam. ch. xv.

The unnecessary and wanton cruelty of David to the inhabitants of Rabba, the chief city of Ammon, taken after its siege by Joab, 2 Sam. ch. xii.

The murder of Saul's seven innocent sons, on pretence of their father's slaughter of the Gibeonites, being the cause of seven years' famine, 2 Sam. ch. xxi.

David's dying charge to Solomon, respecting Joab and Shimei, 1 Kings, ch. ii.

The slaughter of seventy of Ahab's sons, 2 Kings, ch. x.

God,

God, as creator, have told us, “ That the
“ world originated from his infinite good-
“ ness; that he is the benevolent parent of
“ all mankind, and that his object in creat-
“ ing them, was to make them virtuous
“ and happy.” And, without doubt, all
this is the natural and genuine consequence
to be inferred from the character of a be-
ing infinitely wise and good, and powerful.
From the books of scripture, however, we
learn no such thing. When we read in
those books what is mentioned, respecting
the creation, we meet with such passages
as the following: “ The heavens declare
“ the glory of God, and the firmament
“ sheweth his handy-work.” “ By the word
“ of the Lord were the heavens made,
“ and all the host of them by the breath
“ of his mouth.” It is in this, or a similar
strain, that creation is spoken of: and we
learn that the world originated from the
power, indeed, of God; but it is never, I
think, ascribed to his *benevolence*. But if

any passages of those books were meant to teach us, that the object of the Deity, in giving being to his intelligent creatures, was the *virtuous happiness* of those creatures; this could never be reconciled with the account given by Christ and his apostles concerning the *unhappy destination* of the majority of the human race. A philosophical christian must maintain that, under the government of a perfect Deity, no *punishments* can take place except such as are *disciplinary*: but will he be able to shew us that scripture punishments are ever so characterized, unless when certain *favourites* are in question; as when Paul declares, "*We are chastened of the Lord*" "that we should not be *condemned* with the *world?*" The *spirit of punishment*, indeed, appears to be a *spirit of vengeance* from the beginning of the Old Testament to the end of the New. In the more ancient books, we read of such expressions as these coming from the mouth of God: "I
" will

“ will render vengeance to mine enemies—
“ I will make mine arrows drunk with
“ blood * :” “ I will tread them in mine
“ anger, and trample them in my fury † :”
“ I poured out mine indignation upon
“ them, I have consumed them with the
“ fire of my wrath ‡ .” And in the later
books we find such passages concerning
God’s treatment of his human offspring, as
the following: “ The Lord Jesus shall be
“ revealed from heaven, with his mighty
“ angels, in flaming fire, taking vengeance
“ on them that know not God, and that
“ obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus
“ Christ : who shall be punished with ever-
“ lasting destruction from the presence of
“ the Lord, and from the glory of his
“ power § :” “ If any man worship the
“ beast and his image, and receive his mark
“ in his forehead or in his hand, the same
“ shall drink of the wine of the wrath of

* Deuteron. ch. xxxii.

† Isaiah, ch. lxiii.

‡ Ezek. ch. xxii.

§ 2 Thess. ch. i.

“ God which is poured out, without mix-
 “ ture, into the cup of his indignation ; and
 “ he shall be tormented with fire and brim-
 “ stone in the presence of the holy angels,
 “ and in the presence of the Lamb : and
 “ the smoke of their torment ascendeth up
 “ for ever and ever*.” Now, when we read
 such passages as the above, delivered to us
 by jewish and christian writers, we have
 ideas irresistibly forced upon our minds ;
 ideas which ill accord with the character of
 a benevolent creator conducting his intel-
 ligent creatures to virtue by means of a
salutary discipline, but agreeing much too
 well with that of an evil dæmon producing,

* It has been objected that there is not any
 thing in the book of Revelation which will prove
 the doctrine of eternal torments for *human beings*
 to be a scriptural doctrine, though the book is of
 acknowledged authority among christians ; be-
 cause the beast and false prophet are mysterious
 personages. But however mysterious they be, the
worshippers of the beast are described as *men* : the
 objection, therefore, is not to the purpose.

and

and gratifying himself with, the spectacle of human misery *.

There can be no doubt that the learned and very respectable Dr. Geddes is a believer both in the jewish and the christian revelation, although he has not told us how much of the scripture he conceives to have the unquestionable sanction of the Deity. In the general preface to his translation of the Bible, which will not appear till his great work is finished, he will explain himself more fully. In the mean time, having occasion to speak of the extirpation of the Canaanites, in the preface to his second volume, he has, like a good and upright man, expressed himself thus in a note: "After all that has been written, either by "jews or christians, in defence of this san-

* The above citation from the Apocalypse informs us, that the holy angels and the Lamb are admitted to the enviable privilege of participating in this horrid species of gratification.

“guinary measure, I confess my reason
“and my religion continually revolt at it:
“and I cannot bring myself to believe that
“such an order proceeded from the mouth
“of God; perhaps not even from the
“mouth of Moses. I am rather willing
“to suspect that it is the fabrication of
“some posterior jew, to justify the cruel-
“ties of his nation. And indeed it is the
“shortest way to justify any measure, and
“to obviate all troublesome objections.
“Such a deed could not be unjust, since
“God authorized and commanded it: who
“will presume to say that what God com-
“mands is unjust? True; but then we
“must first be well assured that he has
“commanded; and the very appearance
“of injustice in the act, is to me a stronger
“proof that he did not command it, than
“the authority of all the jewish historians
“put together. I was grieved to read in
“a late elegant *Apology for the Bible* so lame
“a justification of that passage: and am
“tempted

“ tempted sometimes to think that the
“ right reverend author must have felt the
“ weakness of his argument, and seen the
“ disparity of his simile.” Such, and so
liberal is the manner in which Dr. Geddes
has expressed himself: and I own it is gra-
tifying to me, to find that what I have ad-
vanced, in opposition to the bishop’s ar-
gument, has so far the concurrence of such
a man*. He has likewise, much to his
honour, when animadverting on the pre-
tended divine order for extirpating the
Amalekites, thrown out, with virtuous in-
dignation, the following apostrophe: “ But,
“ O God of Justice, couldst thou, then,
“ have given the sanguinary injunction to
“ destroy, without mercy and without ex-
“ ception, a whole unoffending nation,
“ men, women, and children, for a crime,
“ real or supposed, committed by their an-
“ cestors four hundred years before? Cre-
“ dat Judæus Apella!”

* See above, pp. 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28.

In the further prosecution of my design, I shall now bring forward, and comment more or less upon certain *narratives* from the Old Testament; and I shall do the same respecting a very important and distinguished *doctrine* of the New.

I shall next animadvert on the *morality* of the New Testament.

I shall then shew why I think that, even though a *part* of the objectionable matter might be rejected, the *whole* could not, consistently with the belief of the christian revelation.

And, lastly, I shall give my reasons for estimating the argument from *testimony* as unsound and insufficient.

SECTION I.

Of Objectionable Stories and Doctrine.

ALTHOUGH it should seem that any exhibition of miracles, to the disturbance and interruption of the course of nature, must be a proceeding unworthy of the immutable Author of nature, it may be observed that, some of those miraculous stories related in the jewish history, strike one as peculiarly degrading to his character. Very strange it is to read of *colloquial discourses* passing between that great and astonishing Being and his human creatures. Nevertheless we read of many such colloquies with Abraham and others. But what must we think when we are told, Gen. ch. xx. that this same Abraham, while a sojourner at a place called Gerar, basely represented his wife Sarah as being

being his *sister* and not his *wife*, thus conniving at an adulterous commerce between her and Abimelech the king of Gerar, which Abraham, it appears, *expected* to take place, though, as the story says, it did not: because God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and informed him that he had taken the wife of a man who was a *prophet*, requiring Abimelech; therefore, to restore the man his wife, otherwise (as we learn from this curious story) God says, “Thou shalt
“surely die; thou and *all that is thine.*” We are further acquainted that God appointed Abraham the *prophet* to pray for the king that he might live. “So Abraham prayed unto God: and God healed
“Abimelech (yet it does not otherwise appear that he was sick) and his wife and
“his maid servants; and they bare children; for the Lord had fast closed up all
“the wombs of the house of Abimelech
“because of Sarah, Abraham’s wife.”—I
say,

say, what must we think of such a tale as this occupying a place in a sacred book? And notwithstanding familiarity has a wonderful power of reconciling us to what is most abhorrent to our natures, surely a person tolerably free from prejudice, cannot fail to shudder, if he will seriously attend to what is related, Gen. ch. xxii. where we are told that God commanded Abraham to *offer up his son as a sacrifice*, and that, in obedience to God, Abraham, having provided wood for the fire, and a knife, was just proceeding to *embrue his hands in his son's blood*, when he was prevented by an angel. That an act in itself so wicked, for which to be *prepared* and *wrought up*, it was requisite for a man to do such horrid and unnatural violence to himself, that such an act should be deemed acceptable to a just and benevolent Deity, is a sad proof how miserably the human mind may be perverted. This instance, however, of Abraham's obedience is re-

presented

presented by the historian as so meritorious* as to have obtained the divine blessing solemnly pronounced, and even sworn, by God himself; and a declaration that, in Abraham's seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed. And truly it has been very generally believed that, in this declaration, Christ was foretold, and the gospel preached to Abraham: for which belief, it must be owned, there is what is called apostolical authority. And by the unthink-

* It cannot be denied that, if Isaac had been taken from his father by a natural death, Abraham would have had an equal opportunity of displaying his *faith* and *pious resignation*, as in the case related. His peculiar merit then, must consist in his doing, or being ready to do, an act of horrid and unnatural wickedness at the command of God. One may add a remark which presents itself on this occasion, viz. That the trial seems to have been intended not so much for Abraham's *improvement* and *benefit* as for the *information* of the Omniscient Being, who is made to say, by the mouth of the angel, "Now, I know that thou fearest God: seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me."

ing

ing *many*, that authority will be esteemed quite sufficient to *sanctify* the above supposed transaction: while the disciples of reason and of nature, will never cease to execrate the *impious fable* as worse even than the former story.

In the book of Exodus, ch. xxxii. we have the history of the golden calf, which Aaron made at the request of the Israelites, and which they worshipped. Wherefore we are told, “ The Lord said unto
 “ Moses, I have seen this people, and be-
 “ hold it is a stiff necked people. Now,
 “ therefore, let me alone, that my wrath
 “ may wax hot against them, and that I
 “ may consume them: and I will make of
 “ thee a great nation.” The history then acquaints us that “ Moses besought the
 “ Lord his God, and said, Lord, why doth
 “ thy wrath wax hot against thy people,
 “ which thou hast brought out of the land of
 “ Egypt?” &c. wherefore should the Egyp-

“ tians speak and say, For mischief did he
“ bring them out, to slay them on the
“ mountains, and to consume them from
“ the face of the earth? Turn from thy
“ fierce wrath, and repent of this evil
“ against thy people. Remember Abra-
“ ham, Isaac, and Israel, thy servants, to
“ whom thou swarest by thine own self,
“ and saidst unto them, I will multiply your
“ seed as the stars of heaven, and all this
“ land that I have spoken of will I give
“ unto your seed, and they shall inherit it
“ for ever. And the Lord repented him
“ of the evil which he thought to do unto
“ his people.” A very extraordinary re-
presentation this of the true God! and,
when the reader has considered it well, he
will decide whether it is more suitable to
his character, or to the character of a frail,
irritable, vain-glorious mortal. The *im-*
mutable Deity is here represented as *liable*
to depart from his purpose; and, when in
great danger, from provocation, of break-
ing

ing his promise, though bound by his oath to perform it, as being *induced to repent of his rashness by the fear of reproach.*

Dr. Geddes says, in the preface to vol. i. of his Translation, p. 12, "Indeed the whole tenor of the Pentateuch convinces me that the more ancient Hebrews were real anthropomorphites: and to this alone, I think, we are to ascribe all those expressions concerning the Deity that seem to degrade the Deity." In this opinion I perfectly coincide with him, excepting that I must contend for its being a *real*, and not merely a *seeming* degradation. But if there were a revelation made to these Hebrews, in order to give them the knowledge of the one true God, we certainly should not expect to find them anthropomorphites.

Another specimen of what is so extremely offensive in any work claiming to have the

G

sanction

sanction of Heaven, shall be produced, not from the books of Moses, but the 1st book of Samuel, ch. i. It is the account of the birth of Samuel, one of the most distinguished personages in the Jewish history. The account says that a man named Elkanah had two wives, Hannah and Peninna: the latter of whom brought him children, while the first was barren, though she seems to have been the most favoured. Between these two women there was much uneasiness, for we are told that Hannah's "adversary provoked her sore for to make
" her fret, because the Lord had shut
" up her womb;" wherefore, it is added, "she was in bitterness of soul, and prayed
" unto the Lord, and wept sore; and she
" vowed a vow and said, O Lord of hosts,
" if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction
" of thine handmaid, and remember me,
" and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt
" give unto thine handmaid a *man-child*,
" then will I give him unto the Lord all the
" days of his life," &c. In the sequel we are
informed

informed that her prayer was granted, that she bare a son, and called his name Samuel.

It must be acknowledged there is in this little tale a number of circumstances unnecessary to be particularized by me, which would render it very interesting if it respected not Almighty God, and only concerned some imagined *local deity* with human passions. But can any serious believer in the all-wise Creator and Governor of the world hear, with patience, of his interfering, by a miracle, to redress a grievance arising from a dispute between Elkanah's two wives? I do not mean to be ludicrous, though some persons might take the occasion. I am in very serious earnest, as I mean to be in all that I shall further advance.

It is not my intention to notice every thing offensive to religion, which is found in the Old Testament. I think it neces-

fary, however, to bring forward certain matters related of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea.

In the xxth ch. of Isaiah we read, “ The
“ Lord spake by Isaiah, the son of Amoz,
“ saying, Go, and *loose the sackcloth from off*
“ *thy loins*, and put off thy shoe from thy
“ foot: and he did so, walking *naked* and
“ *bare-foot*. And the Lord said, like as
“ my servant Isaiah hath walked naked and
“ bare-foot, three years, for a *sign* and
“ *wonder* upon Egypt and upon Ethiopia:
“ so shall the king of Assyria lead away the
“ Egyptians prisoners, and the Ethiopians
“ captives, young and old, naked and bare-
“ foot, even *with their buttocks uncovered*.”

In the ivth ch. of Ezekiel, we read that he was commanded by God to make a representation, on a tile of Jerusalem besieged:—that he was then commanded to lie first on his left side, during three hundred

dred and ninety days, and bear the iniquity of the house of Israel, and afterward to lie on his right side during forty days, and bear the iniquity of the house of Judah:—that he was further commanded to make a certain kind of bread, of which he was to eat while he lay on his side three hundred and ninety days:—and that he was likewise commanded to bake this bread *in the sight* of his countrymen, with *human dung**. And the Lord said, (as we are told) “Even “ *thus* shall the children of Israel eat their “ defiled bread among the Gentiles whither I will drive them.” We are, however, informed that, on his remonstrating, the prophet was permitted to use cow’s dung as a substitute.

What I shall produce respecting the prophet Hosea, occurs in the first and third

* If the reader should be disgusted, he may very well suppose that I, too, am so. Nevertheless, if he will take the trouble to consult his Bible, he will perceive that I am guilty of no exaggeration.

chapters of the book which bears his name. He is there said to have received an order from God as thus: "Go, take unto thee
" a wife of whoredoms and children of
" whoredoms; for the land hath committed great whoredom, departing from
" the Lord." It is added, "So he went and
" took Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim [supposed a common prostitute] " which
conceived and bare him a son," and as the narrative further tells us, she afterwards bare him two others. In the third chapter he speaks of himself in the first person.
" Then said the Lord unto me, Go yet,
" love a woman beloved of her friend, yet
" an adulteress, according to the love of
" the Lord toward the children of Israel," &c. " So I bought her unto me for
" fifteen pieces of silver, and for an homer
" of barley, and an half homer of barley.
" And I said unto her, Thou shalt abide
" for me many days, thou shalt not play
" the harlot, and thou shalt not be for ano-
" ther

“ther man, so will I also be for thee.”
But he has not acquainted us that he had any children by this adulteress.

Now, though there are many whose faith cannot be staggered by any *indecenty* or *absurdity*, however gross, or *wickedness*, however flagrant, which may appear to have the countenance of their religion, imagining that thereby such enormities are consecrated, and their very nature changed; there are yet some who are incapable of doing such violence to their reason. Of this number was the late Mr. Farmer, a learned and ingenious man. According to this gentleman, many learned writers have attempted to shew that Hosea’s marrying Gomer, and taking to him children of whoredom—that Jeremiah’s putting a linen girdle upon his loins, going to the Euphrates, and hiding it in a hole of a rock—that these, and many other actions ascribed to the ancient prophets,

were only *imaginary* and *scenical*, and that narratives of this kind are to be understood as a history only of *prophetic visions*, though it be not *positively said* that the things related were no where performed but upon the stage of fancy. And Mr. Farmer, for himself, declares, “ We may well allow
 “ that all these things, or most of them,
 “ were transacted only in vision; not
 “ merely because we hereby avoid the in-
 “ conveniences attending the literal in-
 “ terpretation; but also because the lively
 “ representation of these things in vision
 “ conveyed the same instruction, and an-
 “ swered every purpose, as well as the real
 “ performance could have done *.” Notwithstanding this bold assertion, it must be evident, to a person of the commonest understanding, that what thus passed, unobserved by any but himself, in the prophet’s

* See an Enquiry into the Nature and Design of Christ’s Temptation in the Wilderness, p. 34. Note.

own imagination, could not convey instruction to other men, which we learn, from the account of several of these supposed transactions, was their object. Ezekiel, we are told, was ordered to bake his bread *in the sight* of his countrymen; Isaiah to walk naked and bare-foot for a *sign* and a *wonder*; and I think, though it is not expressly so affirmed, we are given to understand that what is said to have been done by Hosea was meant for a *sign* and a *wonder* too. Yet, as *signs* and *wonders*, it is certain that these supposed transactions could not answer their end, unless they were not visionary matters, but matters of fact, and matters also of *public notoriety*. I shall not dispute the *convenience* of this mode of interpretation, which seems to have been the grand reason for adopting it *.

Such are some of the unworthy, and I scruple not to style them impious, repre-

* See Appendix, No. 1.

representations of the Deity found in the Old Testament. But it has been asserted that, nothing can be more engaging, or more consistent with true philosophy, than the amiable representations of the Supreme, which the New Testament affords; where he is continually described as a Father:—*whose design, therefore, must be to make his children, i. e. all his creatures, happy.*

Now I am very willing to admit that true philosophy would indeed lead us to conceive of God as the UNIVERSAL PARENT: but I am persuaded that this idea never found its way into the mind of Jesus Christ, or the minds of his apostles. The term Father, as used by them, seems to denote the relation subsisting, or imagined to subsist, between the Deity and the *Christian brotherhood*, “the household of faith,” with Jesus Christ at the head of it. This appears from the account given by Christ and his apostles of the *future condition*

dition to which the great majority of the human race is destined; which is *a state of misery without end.*

That Christ meant his hearers should thus conceive of the future condition of wicked men, whom he always describes as the great majority, there seems no room to doubt when we read his reiterated declarations concerning the fire that *never shall be quenched*, and the worm that *dieth not*. The language is utterly improper, and what he could not have used, if he intended to be understood as holding out the punishment of *annihilation*, or *complete destruction*. In that case, the appropriate terms would have been a *consuming* fire and a *devouring* worm. The language, moreover, employed by Christ, corresponds perfectly with the apocalyptical account of a lake of fire where men are to be tormented, and where the smoke of their torment is said to ascend for ever and ever.

But

But certain philosophical christians being shocked, as well they may be, at such a doctrine, affirm that there are no words of Christ which express, i. e. express *literally*, the idea of eternal torments. The writings of the New Testament, it is true, are remarkable for *figurative* expressions. However, the sense of any writer may be clear and determinate, when the expression is *figurative*. If one should say, "The fleet
" sailed from the *mouth* of the river; or,
" The cottage stands at the *foot* of the
" mountain:" I cannot believe any man would contend that the words composing either of those sentences do not convey a meaning clear and determinate. It seems evident to me, therefore, that a doctrine may be clearly taught in a book where it is never once expressed *literally*. And, therefore, when Jesus Christ addressed his hearers in the terms above quoted, it appears to me that he taught, though not *literally*, the doctrine of *eternal torments*, this being the *genuine import* of his words.

It is extraordinary that those philosophical christians, who say they derive their belief of a future state of virtuous happiness for all human beings from the gospel of Jesus Christ, should yet find themselves compelled to acknowledge (as I believe most of them do acknowledge) that Jesus Christ himself, and his apostles, with the exception of Paul, expected the *ultimate destruction* of the wicked, like chaff and tares cast into an unquenchable fire, or a carcase exposed to an immortal worm, which must in time be totally consumed. But if Christ and his apostles expected, and taught, that the Deity intended to consign the great majority of the human race to a miserable existence first, and then to ultimate destruction, they unquestionably never drew the philosophical inference from the *paternal character* of the Deity—that it must be his design to make his *children* (viz. all his creatures) happy. With their views, so to reason was impossible. And further we may remark,
though

though it were admitted that those extraordinary teachers never delivered the doctrine of *eternal* torments, and only taught that God would consign his human offspring to *great* and to *final misery*, surely thus to represent the Supreme Being, is to represent him not as a *benevolent*, but rather as an *unnatural* Father *.

When we contemplate the character of a wise and benevolent Parent subjecting his children to *salutary discipline*, from such a character it is not in our power to withhold our *love* and *respect*. But all men must agree to acknowledge that it is not such a character which is suggested to us by the doctrine of *eternal*, or that of *final*, misery, or by that striking prediction of fiery vengeance above † cited from Paul's 2d Epistle to the Thessalonians. Nevertheless, in order to the very *being* of true piety, it is necessary that the worshipper

* See Appendix, No. 2. † Page 69.

should conceive of the object of his worship as possessing the attributes of wisdom, benevolence and justice: because any thing meriting the name of piety or religion, must include *veneration*. A Deity wanting these attributes *cannot* be a venerable object. Such, however, is the scriptural Deity, as appears from the representations of him which have been adduced from the Old and New Testament. He may be the object of servile fear, or presumptuous confidence; and miserable flattery may be offered up to him in the way of worship: he may even be the object of gratitude for partial favour, of which the worshipper may fondly dream: but, till the natures of good and evil are changed, the object of *veneration* he *cannot* be.

SECTION II.

Of the Morality of the New Testament.

I SHALL now proceed to consider the morality of the New Testament, which by the late Mr. Soame Jenyns was deemed to possess such peculiar excellence as alone to furnish proof of the truth of the christian revelation. This he has endeavoured to shew in his book on the Internal Evidence. The account of evangelical morality there given by that very elegant and ingenious writer has been highly commended by a living author of great reputation, Archdeacon Paley; though he is of opinion that the proper argument for christianity, as a revelation, rests upon other ground. The archdeacon, moreover, thus speaks on the subject for himself.

“ The truth is, there are two opposite

“ descrip-

“ descriptions of character under which
“ mankind may generally be placed. The
“ one possesses vigour, firmness, resolu-
“ tion, is daring and active, quick in its
“ sensibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in
“ its attachments, inflexible in its purpose,
“ violent in its resentments.

“ The other meek, yielding, comply-
“ ing, forgiving: not prompt to act, but
“ willing to suffer, silent and gentle under
“ rudeness and insult, suing for reconcilia-
“ tion where others would demand satisfac-
“ tion, giving way to the pushes of impu-
“ dence, conceding and indulgent to the
“ prejudices, the wrongheadedness, the in-
“ tractability of those with whom it has
“ to deal.

“ The former of these characters is, and
“ ever hath been, the favourite of the
“ world. It is the character of great men.
“ There is a *dignity* in it which universally
“ commands respect.

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“The

“ The latter is *poor-spirited, tame* and
“ *abject*. Yet so it hath happened that,
“ with the founder of christianity, this
“ latter is the subject of his commenda-
“ tion, his precepts, his *example*; and that
“ the former is so in no part of its compo-
“ sition. This, and nothing else, is the cha-
“ racter designed in the following remark-
“ able passages: *Resist not evil, but who-*
“ *soever shall smite thee on the right cheek,*
“ *turn to him the other also; and if any man*
“ *will sue thee at the law, and take away*
“ *thy coat, let him have thy cloke also; and*
“ *whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go*
“ *with him twain: love your enemies; bless*
“ *them that curse you; do good to them that*
“ *hate you; and pray for them which despite-*
“ *fully use you, and persecute you.* This,
“ certainly, is not common-place morality.
“ It is very original. It shews at least
“ (and it is for this purpose we produce
“ it) that no two things can be more dif-
“ ferent than the heroic and the Christian
“ character.”

“ Now

“ Now the author to whom I refer
“ [Mr. Jenyns] has not only remarked
“ this difference more strongly than any
“ preceding writer, but has proved in con-
“ tradiction to first impressions, to popular
“ opinion, to the encomiums of orators
“ and poets, and even to the suffrages
“ of historians and moralists, that the latter
“ possesses the most of true worth, as being
“ most difficult either to be acquired or
“ sustained, and as contributing most to
“ the happiness of social life*.” Mr.
Paley then gives the state of Mr. Jenyns’s
argument. But, not to extend the quota-
tion, let us admit that the latter of these
characters is demonstrated to be the pre-
ferable one. Nevertheless, may it not
still be, in point of moral excellence, very
inferior to what we can conceive? And may
we not, very naturally, inquire further,

* See Paley’s *View of the Evidences of Christianity*, vol. ii. pp. 101, 102, 103, 104.

Whether it be not possible to resist and oppose the unjust treatment of wicked men, without being actuated by a spirit of revenge?

Whether the opposing injustice, with firmness and temper, be not the best way to *check* it?

Whether non-resistance of ill-treatment be not the ready way to *invite* it*?

* The Quakers seem to have been the only *consistent* christians in regard to the doctrine of non-resistance: all other christians having not only practised in direct opposition to their Master's precepts, but having, likewise, contumaciously defended their practice. On this occasion, I cannot avoid recollecting the ridicule upon the conduct of the Friends, which Lord Lyttelton, the great champion of christianity, has put into the mouth of Cortez, the conqueror of Mexico, in his dialogue with William Penn. And, I doubt not, his lordship considered Cortez's retort not merely as natural for him to use, but as *just* in itself.—See Dialogues of the Dead.

Whether

Whether the happiness of social life be not better promoted by properly *checking* unjust men, than by *inviting* and *encouraging* them to acts of injustice?

Whether the precepts enjoining the non-resistance of evil, the complying with unjust requirements, even beyond what is required, the giving more of one's property to him who would wrongfully take away a part (i. e. literally giving a reward for a robbery) do not enjoin a *false* and *unsound* species of morality? And, lastly,

Whether it be reasonable to expect that *such* morality should proceed from a teacher of morals, immediately sent from God, and by him specially appointed to that office?

In a sermon of Tillotson's, on the obligations of christians to a holy life, he uses this language, "When thou art about to
H 3 "debase thyself—remember thou art a
"christian."

“christian.” So speaks the archbishop; and he is, by no means, singular. But the exhortation does not accord very happily with the archdeacon’s description of the christian character, as being a *poor-spirited* thing, *tame* and *abject*; a character, however, which he affirms that Christ himself *exemplified*. This, it must be owned, is extraordinary, as coming from a friend to christianity, and a christian advocate. What other christians think of it, I know not. Yet it is certainly a question which they will do well to consider attentively, Whether Mr. Paley be authorized, by the passages he has cited, to apply, as he has, the above-mentioned revolting epithets? Whatever may be their determination on this point, it must be evident, I think, to any person who will exercise his judgment freely, as on other occasions, that the morality of the New Testament is, at least, *imperfect* and *defective*. But I will venture to go further and to affirm, that the doctrine

trine exhibited in that book, as delivered by Christ himself, is, in some instances, highly censurable for its *immorality*. In proof of this charge, I appeal to two parables recorded in Matthew's history. In the first of these* we are told of a king who had a servant that stood indebted to him in the amount of ten thousand talents. "But for as much (says the story) as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be *sold*, and his wife and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made." However, upon the debtor's supplication, we are informed that his lord *forgave* him. This servant, nevertheless, refusing to shew like mercy to a fellow-servant who owed him a hundred talents, it is said, "his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the *tormentors* till he should pay all that was due unto him." It is observable, we are not told that *the wife and children* of this servant were delivered

* See xviiiith chapter.

to the tormentors, though in the first instance they were ordered to be sold. But, passing over this matter, I would request serious and honest men to declare, whether they, in their consciences, esteem it a right, or a wrong procedure, to *torment* a person for the non-payment of what, it is confessed, he *cannot* pay? And then, Whether they can see any justice in punishing a man for the non-payment of a debt which has been *cancelled*? What is most deserving of notice in the story is, this unrighteous king is proposed as the *representative* of the Deity.

In the other parable* we have presented to us a householder who is said to have hired labourers to work in his vineyard, and to have agreed to pay the same sum to all, notwithstanding several of them were hired at a very late hour. When the evening arrived, we are told, “ The lord of the

* Matt. xxth chapter.

“ vineyard

“ vineyard said unto his steward, Call the
“ labourers and give them their hire, be-
“ ginning from the *last* unto the first.”

But they who had laboured the whole day murmured, upon seeing those who had laboured one hour only paid equally with themselves. Upon which, the lord of the vineyard is represented as addressing one of the murmurers in the following terms:

“ Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst thou
“ not agree with me for a penny? Take
“ that thine is, and go thy way: I will
“ give unto this last even as unto thee.

“ Is it not *lawful* for me to do what I will
“ *with my own*? Is thine eye *evil* because
“ I am *good*?”

Now, though it should be granted that there was no breach of justice in paying the *same sum* to the labourers of one hour and to those who had “ borne
“ the burthen and heat of the day*,” yet
the

* I do not know that any learned theologian has ever attempted to reconcile the doctrine taught here

the making such a distinction in the *presence* of those who had dearly earned their hire, will scarcely fail to receive the blame due to an *invidious act* from every good mind which *dares* to have an opinion. But the thing which is most striking, and peculiarly objectionable, is, the *general maxim* implied in the question, "May I
 "not *do what I will with my own?*" From the mouth of a despot, one would not wonder to hear this language; it might suit well enough the character of an avaricious churl, or a riotous libertine; but surely it is not what we should expect a good man to utter; notwithstanding the person to whom it is attributed calls himself so. It is, however, most extraordinary that this

here with the doctrine that men shall be rewarded *according to their works*. Neither do I remember to have met with any one who undertook to shew how well the conduct ascribed to the lord of the vineyard squared with that excellent precept, "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto
 "you, do ye even so unto them."

person

person should, like the king in the preceding story, be made to represent the *Author of all good*.

But, as the moral capacity of man is derived from his intellect, and as the *highest* species of moral merit cannot exist without much intellectual improvement, it is necessary, in estimating the morality of the New Testament, to consider what aspect the doctrines of that book have upon intellectual culture. And, I think, it will scarcely be affirmed that what we call a liberal curiosity or desire of knowledge ever received much encouragement either from Christ or his apostles. The genius, indeed, of christianity seems quite unfriendly to the pursuits of science and philosophy.—Christians are told that One Thing is needful,—that they are pilgrims and strangers on earth, and should seek a better country; and they are exhorted to set their affections on things

things above, not on earthly things. What Mr. Jenyns says of this *detachment from the world* well deserves notice. He describes it as “a moral virtue constituted by this “religion [christianity] alone: so new “that, even at this day, few of its profes- “sors can be persuaded that it is required, “or that it is any virtue at all*.” True it is, that he seems to have thought it needed some explanation: and some persons may imagine he has pretty well explained it away. To me it appears that, where this new virtue has *taken fast hold*, the mind has generally been disqualified for scientific pursuits, and for any other than imagined heavenly ones: and, upon the other hand, I believe, on inquiry, it will be found that, where christians have attained great eminence as philosophers, they have set their affections both on science itself and on that *distinguished situation*

* See Jenyns's View of the Internal Evidence, &c. p. 85.

which

which they have occupied among their fellow men. "They have received honour one from another, and sought not the honour which cometh from God only."

That Christ himself was no friend to philosophical investigation is evident from the manner in which he delivered his instructions. He seldom, if ever, spoke but in the tone of authority, and required his *sayings* to be received implicitly, on pain of incurring the displeasure and even the condemnation of the Almighty. And Paul, though an argumentative writer, and by some complimented with the title of philosopher, so far from recommending, has expressly cautioned those to whom he wrote against the mischievous tendency of philosophy. It is alleged, indeed, that Paul, by the term, intended to designate the doctrine of the Gnostics. If so, he is censurable for great inaccuracy, not to say injustice,

injustice, in giving exclusively the name of philosophy to what he esteemed false and mischievous, while (as it is supposed by these his advocates) he was acquainted with a better philosophy, the advantages of which he withheld from those for whose instruction he was writing. In my opinion, the praise of philosophical investigation was not due to him for any thing of his which I have seen; and I do not conceive that he either was, or pretended to be, a philosopher. A philosopher inquires concerning *truth* and *good*; likewise concerning the *nature of man*, and what it is which constitutes his perfection and happiness: And where any *religion* whatsoever is in question, he inquires whether it bears the marks of *truth* and *good*, and how it is calculated to influence the mind. Moreover he is very cautious in his inquiry, lest he should be subjected to imposition, always demanding what shall appear to him just and satisfactory evidence.

Now

Now to me, it seems as if it had been the object of Paul to *reprobate* such inquiries, and to *brand* them, as highly offensive to the Deity. “It is written, (saith he to the Corinthians, Epist. i. chap. 1.) “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, “and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? “Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this world? Hath not God “made foolish the wisdom of this world?” —and adds much more in the same strain.

Upon the whole, it is sufficiently evident that the morality of the New Testament, defective as it is, and in certain instances pernicious, is not of divine origin; and it is equally plain that, the detachment from the world, the submissive acquiescence and implicit faith required by its first teachers, are hostile to intellectual improvement. I strongly suspect, indeed, that some advocates for christianity are
not

not perfectly aware “ what spirit they are “ of.” It is not a Christian spirit. In some respects, perhaps, it is better.

SECTION III.

Of Objectionable Matter inseparable from the Christian Faith.

WHILE the generality of christians have believed, or affected to believe, that the canonical books of scripture were written by men divinely inspired for that purpose, certain speculative and philosophical persons admitting the truth both of the old Revelation and the new, have nevertheless thought the greatest part of scripture to have been written without inspiration, because it was unnecessary; and they have likewise thought many things contained in the scriptural books to be, on several accounts, highly objectionable. Some of these

these matters they have explained away, and others they have rejected.

I do not mean to assert, that a man may not reject much scriptural matter (and much there is) which must be extremely offensive to a religious person who has not renounced his understanding, and still be a consistent believer in both Revelations; but, in my apprehension, there are some things of this kind which are inseparable from the proper christian faith. And as that which cannot be well disputed, I shall mention the doctrine of Christ himself recorded by the evangelists.

I know there are some christians who contend for the *fallibility* of their Master: but I doubt much whether he would have admitted such men as his disciples if, when he was living, he had met with any such candidates for discipleship. Should the reader think otherwise, let him carefully
I attend

attend to the character assumed by Jesus Christ, and the style in which he delivered himself. From the latter, perhaps, his pretensions may be more certainly learned than from the expressions which, when speaking of himself, he has chosen to adopt. Though he sometimes, indeed very rarely, condescends to *reason* with his audience; the general strain of his lectures is a strain of high authority. This is their characteristic distinction. Again and again the remarkable phraseology occurs "Verily, " verily *I say* unto you, &c." Considering this in connection with such passages as the following, in which he announces himself, we can neither be much at a loss concerning his lofty pretensions, nor how he would have borne to hear them questioned. These, we are told, are his expressions: "He whom God hath sent speaketh the " *words of God*: for God giveth not the " spirit by measure to him *." "He that

* John, 3d chapter, 34th verse.

" loveth

“loveth me not keepeth not my *sayings*:
“and the word which you hear is not
“*mine*, but the *Father's* who sent me*.”
“Verily, verily I say unto you, the Son
“can do nothing of himself but what he
“seeth the Father do: for what things
“soever he doth, these also doth the Son
“likewise. For the Father loveth the Son,
“and *sheweth him all things* which himself
“doth, &c.†” “Of that day and that
“hour knoweth no man, no, not the an-
“gels which are in heaven, *neither the Son*,
“but the Father‡.” “All things are
“delivered unto me of my Father; and no
“man knoweth the Son but the Father:
“neither knoweth any man the Father
“save the Son, and he to whomsoever
“the Son will reveal him§.” This is

* John, 14th chap. 24th verse. † John, 5th chap.

‡ Mark, 13th chapter. This, indeed, does not agree very well with the preceding quotation: but that is not my affair.

§ Matthew, 11th chapter.

certainly very extraordinary language, and such as, I believe, never fell from the lips of any other human being.

Now the grand doctrine, in the estimation of philosophical christians, which this singular Teacher delivered, is the doctrine of a future life of *happiness* for good, and *misery* for bad men. But if they believe this doctrine upon the authority of Christ, it appears to me they must, if consistent, believe, likewise, upon the same authority, that the bad men (who, we are told by the same authority, compose the great mass of mankind) are to be consigned to *durable* and *final*, if not to everlasting misery*; which, consequently, must have been the fate always intended for them by their

* This is confessed to be the doctrine of *Christ* by some christians who discover, or think they discover, in the writings of *Paul*, the doctrine of ultimate virtuous happiness for *all men*.—See pp. 93 and 94.

Maker,

Maker, intended even in the moment of their creation.

The above is adduced as a striking instance of objectionable matter inseparable from the belief of a consistent christian; though, in my own opinion, it is very far from being the only instance, and it is possible that, in this respect, the reader may think with me.

SECTION IV.

Of the Insufficiency of the Argument from Testimony.

THE argument in proof of the christian Revelation derived from testimony is esteemed the principal argument, and, by very respectable men, considered as irrefragable. I apprehend it will be fairly stated thus :

Because the first christians professed their confident belief in the truth of the christian

tian miracles, and because, under the influence of that belief, they acted and suffered and even sacrificed their lives—it is inferred that therefore the christian miracles were real ; and from their reality the truth of the christian revelation is inferred.

In opposition to this may be put the ignorance of the *age*, relative to the subject under consideration, and particularly of the *people* in the first place concerned. To the jews, a miracle seems to have been nothing very *extraordinary*: and, with the more enlightened part of mankind, prodigies seem not at all to have been inadmissible. The philosophical and scrutinizing spirit of modern times did not exist. And when it has been said, with triumph, that Julian, (who, indeed, lived some centuries after Christ) although the accomplished and the determined enemy of christianity, did not *deny* the reality of the christian miracles, it seems to have been forgotten that,

that, with all his accomplishments and great abilities, Julian was *remarkable* as a believer in prodigies and miracles.

Further, whereas it has been asserted that, on supposition the christian miracles were not real, the state of mind and conduct of the first christians had no adequate natural cause, and therefore were greater miracles than any mentioned in the New Testament:—now they must, indeed, be admitted to have been miracles if the assertion be true: but that cannot be admitted, since it does not follow that there was no adequate natural cause, because we are unable to discover any. A sincere and cordial *belief*, in whatever way generated, was quite sufficient to produce the conduct of the persons in question. How far weak, and ignorant, and superstitious men, who are yet honest and upright, may be *imposed on*, I will not undertake to say: but it must be granted that such men are *liable* to imposition:

I 4

position: and, I think, it will not be denied that men of a superior character, amiable PHILANTHROPISTS, prompted by generous sentiments, and aspiring to become the BENEFACTORS of their species, *may* be induced to *impose both on others and on themselves*. This leads me to suggest to philosophical unitarians, who believe Jesus Christ to have been merely *a human being*, that it may be worthwhile for them to reconsider the very striking and absolutely *singular* style used by that extraordinary personage when speaking of himself.

With respect to the opinion, that the jews were familiar with the idea of a miracle, it is derived from the evangelical history. John says, that the brethren of Christ did not believe in him, though they were no strangers to the works which he performed; for they advised him to render himself more conspicuous thereby, and shew
I
himself

himself to the world *. The same writer declares, that though Christ had done *so many* miracles before them (the jewish people) yet they believed not on him †.— Now, if we reflect on the nature of a miracle, we must see that it cannot fail to excite the utmost astonishment in those present at it, unless they be familiarized to such things: or unless the Supreme Being, (as the historian would have us believe) at the same time that he, by his prophet, works miracles, blinds the eyes of the persons in whose presence they are wrought, and hardens their hearts, so that the miracles cannot produce their effect.

That the jews did not think a miracle to be a very strange thing, seems evident, likewise, from the story which John relates at the beginning of his 5th chapter:—
“ There is (saith he) at Jerusalem, by the
“ sheep-market, a pool, which is called in

* John, 7th chapter. † John, 12th chapter.

“ the

“ the Hebrew tongue, Bethesda, having
 “ five porches. In these lay a great mul-
 “ titude of impotent folk, of blind, halt,
 “ withered, waiting for the moving of
 “ the water. For an angel went down,
 “ at a certain season, into the pool, and
 “ troubled the water. Whosoever, then,
 “ first after the troubling of the water step-
 “ ped in, was made whole of whatsoever
 “ disease he had*.” On this story it is

* A philosophical clergyman, on a certain occasion, declared to me, that he should as soon believe a Persian tale as this extraordinary narrative. The history of the Devil's temptation of Christ in the wilderness † seems, however, to bear more resemblance to a Persian tale. Now, I would observe that, whatever *absurdity* an unprejudiced reader may find in these two stories, they are both related with the same *simplicity* as that whereby the writings of the evangelists are generally distinguished. Simplicity of style, it is therefore presumed, does not necessarily imply truth. Nevertheless, it is well known how much stress has been laid on the simple style of the evangelical histories.

† See Appendix, No. 1.

obvious

obvious to remark, that the historian relates it as he would the story of any ordinary occurrence: and, wonderful as the events related must have been, if real, we do not learn from him that they produced any emotion in the bystanders, or even attracted at all the attention of the inhabitants of Jerusalem. At London, I presume, if such things were to happen, the effect would be somewhat different.

The *dæmoniaca* *possessions*, too, supposed to occur so frequently among this superstitious people, and of which we read so much in the evangelical histories, were considered by them as *miraculous*; equally so as the *means* whereby the dæmons were thought to be expelled: and Christ himself appears to have admitted that various other men, as well as himself, were in the habit of performing miraculous expulsions. “ If I (saith he) by Beelzebub cast out de-
“ vils,

“ vils, by whom do your *children* cast them
 “ out *?”

From

* Not being able to digest the doctrine of Christ and the evangelists upon this subject, some philosophical christians have taken the liberty to represent both their *master* and his immediate *disciples* as ignorant believers in the popular superstition ; while others have thought it more for their master's honour, to suppose him perfectly aware that there was no diabolical agency in these cases ; but that, not esteeming it necessary to remove the false notions of them, entertained even by his own disciples, he *connived at their delusion*. If, however, he really knew better, he seems to have not merely connived ; he seems to have done *more*, when he affected to hold conversation with the evil spirits, and likewise to authorize certain of them, on their expulsion, to take possession of a herd of swine. Nevertheless, that Christ himself was, in this respect, as ignorant as other jews, no ingenuous person, probably, would doubt, who should derive his opinion from the evangelists, and not from the above-mentioned philosophers. But should any one judge that Christ was so ignorant and superstitious as to believe that, which was indeed no-
 thing

From hence we are naturally led to consider the Reply to an Objection urged by certain unbelievers. They have objected that, if the miracles which the New Testament speaks of as wrought in proof of christianity were *real miracles*, the whole jewish nation must have been converted; as the evidence must have been irresistible. To this some have replied, that the jews were induced to reject the evidence by supposing the miracles to have been effected by the magical use of the *divine name*. This reply, if just and well-founded, sufficiently stamps the character of the people: and, I think, a smile may be pardoned, if, from the authors of such a reply, we should happen to hear of

thing more than a natural disease, to be the effect of diabolical agency, I entreat that man to consider how well such ignorance and superstition agree with the claims of this amiable and dignified enthusiast to that immeasurable knowledge which he declared had been communicated to him by the Supreme Being.

jews

jews being disposed to *scrutinize* miracles. Superstition seems much better calculated to make men *believers* than to make them *scrutinizers*. And, though we admit that the Hebrew christians had a strong interest to examine carefully, it seems not very reasonable to judge that this interest would have the same effect upon a superstitious jew as upon an enlightened modern European in circumstances otherwise similar. And who of the jewish nation was free from superstition if, as is probable, Christ himself was not? The same *external* circumstances do not affect all men in the same manner. To suppose they do, is a gross fallacy.

The jews, it is likely, often imagined they saw miracles where none existed. But the *antecedent improbability* of miracles and revelation must, I should think, to a philosopher, be an objection against them almost, if not, altogether insurmountable.

Granting

Granting it, however, possible that miracles may have been wrought in order to accomplish some grand design not otherwise to be accomplished even by the *All-wise* and the *Almighty*, it is natural to inquire, Has any such matter been effected by the christian miracles?—The great object of christianity, as its advocates declare, was the *reformation of the world*. Allowing then that it was worth while to *disturb the order of nature* for so excellent a purpose, Has the world been reformed? The bold-est christian advocate will not, I believe, assert so much. Seriously, I have no idea of any thing more extravagant than the assertion would be. Yet let us suppose (what cannot be thought too little) that, out of the immense population of this globe, during a period of near eighteen centuries, some *millions* have become virtuous christians;—what proportion do they bear to the innumerable multitude of individuals who have composed the generations

rations of mankind which, during the same period, have successively tenanted the earth? Let us also suppose that christianity has contributed towards the melioration of human affairs. Still, how far the effect is to be ascribed to *it simply*, and how far to a liberal and benevolent *philosophy*, will not be easily settled. In the mean time, I consider myself as completely justified in affirming, if christianity were a scheme for reforming the world, *that it has most egregiously failed.*

How it may appear to others I cannot tell, but it does not seem to me very credible, admitting the possibility of miracles, that such an unfortunate scheme should have originated from, and have been supported by, the *miraculous interference* of the Deity: and to an unprejudiced person, I suspect, it will not be very satisfactory, as a solution of the difficulty, to hear “That
“ the reformation is going on, and, in due
“ time, will be happily perfected.”

But

But, as the world has not been reformed by the christian religion, should we inquire what that religion has actually done for mankind, it will appear, that in giving occasion to *wars* and *persecutions* the most bloody and rancorous, it has produced a very great quantity of *evil*. Of this there can be no doubt; and, while this cannot be denied, it is foreign to the question to talk, as some do, of its genuine moral tendency (be that ever so admirable), because we are inquiring about matter of fact. With regard to the *good* which has taken place since the commencement of the christian æra, part of it at least, probably a large proportion, must be attributed to the *general diffusion of knowledge*. We are pretty well informed what was the condition of christendom during the middle ages, as they are termed. Since the revival of learning, there has been a progressive improvement, though not regularly progressive. Yet it well deserves notice,

K

that,

that, since christianity has prevailed, there has existed in the world an evil greater than any that was ever experienced before that religion was known:—I mean the African slave trade, carried on by people calling themselves *christians*. It will be observed, I do not say that this horrid traffic has been *authorized*, and it is not needful for me to prove that it has not been *prevented*, by christianity.

I do not, however, profess, nor ever have professed, myself qualified to explain sufficiently the conduct of the first christians: but I find myself in a situation where it is necessary to choose between two difficulties; and therefore I choose the least. I must either admit that the first christians were *under a delusion*, or that the *all-wise* Author of the universe has disturbed the order of nature for the accomplishment of what has not been accomplished; when, had it been his purpose to reform the world (as christians

tians assert), he could have effected that purpose by the *operation of natural causes**, without having recourse to *miracles*; which, consequently, were superfluous and unnecessary. The last part of the alternative is, indeed, something more than a *difficulty*; it is an *impossibility*; which, I am satisfied, cannot be truly affirmed of the other, however extraordinary it may appear: and, were we in possession of the *whole truth*, every thing would, I believe, appear very natural.

“Nature well known, no *prodigies* remain.”

It is hoped the Apology contained in the foregoing pages, will be sufficient to shew that persons may be induced to become unbelievers in revealed religion by better motives than those which have been imputed to such persons by some, from

* I must request the reader to turn back to pp. 59 and 60.

whom they might have expected different treatment*.

A love of truth, a dislike of imposition, and a desire of emancipation from unworthy and illiberal prejudices—these are principles † which influence the minds of ingenuous men in their inquiries: and one would be apt to think such men would not find it difficult to conceive that others might be governed by the same principles, though their inquiries should not terminate in the same manner as their own.

* With respect to myself, I think it right to say here that I have been treated with great liberality by a philosophical christian, who has done me the honour to correspond with me on the subject of these papers.

† Though these are, in my estimation, virtuous principles, and the pledges of further virtue in the character where they are found, they have been represented (how justly let the reader determine) as existing where there is but little virtue.

A dif-

A different termination seems, however, to have given offence. Yet surely no one, be his reputation or his merits what they may, is authorized, after having determined for himself, to prescribe the limit for other men, and issue out his prohibition, "Thus far shall ye go, and no further."

APPENDIX,

No. I.

WHEN animadverting upon certain strange facts related of the prophets Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hosea, I had occasion to mention Mr. Farmer's convenient method of solving such difficulties, by considering them as merely *visionary*. That method appeared so convenient to him, that he has been induced to convert what the writers of the Gospel History have evidently delivered as *matters of fact*, really and truly performed, into *prophetic visions*. I refer to his interpretation of the several narratives of Christ's temptation in the wilderness. This interpretation is principally founded on the phraseology used, where it is said, that Christ was *led by the Spirit*, and *driven by the*

Spirit, into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Mr. F. supposes these expressions equivalent to those used to denote the supernatural operation which was thought to produce visions in the minds of the prophets of the Old Testament. The books, however, where the accounts of these visions occur, are professedly books treating of *visionary matters*. And yet, even in these books, should certain things be related as having really taken place, *without any intimation* of their having been *transacted in vision merely*,—to suppose this, seems to be doing something very like *violence*. But to make the same supposition respecting a narrative given as a relation of facts which had really happened, by any writer professing himself to be a historian of real transactions,—is surely *violence in the extreme*.

To justify his own interpretation, Mr. F. further, insists much on the impropriety
of

of conceiving the writers in question to mean that Christ was actually led by the Spirit into the wilderness, because he was in the wilderness *already*. It was in the Jordan, however, where we are given to understand that he was baptized by John: and the region bordering on the eastern bank of that river could not be absolutely a *desart*, since it was an inhabited country, though not very populous. But, from Mark's account, it appears that Christ, when in the wilderness, was *among the wild beasts*; which circumstance seems to be mentioned as an aggravation of his trial. It is, therefore, most natural to understand these writers as meaning to say, that Christ was led eastward into the country which was, indeed, a *desart without inhabitants*.

Mr. F. nevertheless, will have it that these writers intended to inform us not that Christ was led into *the* wilderness, but

but into *a* wilderness, i. e. a *visionary* wilderness.

Now it is observable, that Dr. Samuel Clarke, and other scripture critics, though not all of equal celebrity with him, had no idea that these narratives of the evangelists could be fairly interpreted, otherwise than as historical relations of matters of fact; excepting what is therein said concerning the exhibition of all the kingdoms of the world, and their glory, in a moment of time; which the doctor supposed to have been a *diabolical* vision.

These learned and able commentators, being not quite so enterprising as Mr. F. probably might judge that, in order to explain what was obscure in the style and manner of a historian, it was proper to have recourse to other historians, rather than to writers of prophecies and visions: and, if the obscurity was found in the production

duction of a man who had himself written another history, perhaps they might judge it peculiarly proper to appeal to that other history, and allow him to be his own expositor. As Luke, therefore, who wrote one of the narratives of the temptation, wrote, likewise, the History of the Acts of the Apostles, if in this latter history he has introduced any accounts of *visions*, these learned commentators would, I imagine, inquire in *what way* they were introduced. And if they found him *expressly declaring* the extraordinary matters to be visions, such as Peter's vision of a sheet let down from heaven with a variety of animals, and Paul's directing him to go into Macedonia, they would naturally conclude that, if he himself understood, and intended his readers should understand, the temptation of Christ to have been a vision, and nothing else, he would have *told them so in plain terms*.

Mr. F.'s

Mr. F.'s zeal in behalf of his new hypothesis was very great, which we need not wonder at; but it seems to have been somewhat extravagant when it drew from him the following language: "The text itself
 " (on the letter of which the common hypothesis rests as its sole foundation) instead of positively and expressly asserting, that the temptation of Christ was a
 " real outward transaction, contains clear
 " intimations, and even *direct assertions*, of
 " the very contrary *."

If so, can any thing be more wonderful than that, till Mr. F. arose, these *direct assertions* were *never understood* by men the most learned and intelligent †?"

But

* Inquiry, pp. 40, 41.

† This is barely within the limits of *possibility*. Those learned men (Dr. S. Clarke, the great Le Clerc, and others mentioned by Mr. F.) would never, I am persuaded, have admitted Mr. F.'s construction of the phrases in question, considering

But the new hypothesis was thought *convenient*, as being not liable to the objections which, in Mr. F.'s opinion, might be justly made to the old one. The *chief* objections are, that the common hypothesis is very dishonourable to Christ. That it ascribes to the devil the performance of the greatest miracles. That it ascribes to the devil the performance of things not only preternatural, but absurd and impossible.

Mr. F. has said much to illustrate and enforce his objections: but it is unnecessary for me to transcribe it all. That, however, which is to my purpose, I shall produce (*viz.*) what he has urged to shew the *dishonour brought upon Christ* by the

ing *where and how they occur*: unless they, too, had been fascinated by the *conveniency* of it. To me it appears a far-fetched construction, laboured and over-strained, and what even Mr. F. himself would not have thought of but for a particular purpose.

common

common explication. “ Scarce (saith he)
“ can we preserve upon our minds a suffi-
“ cient reverence of the sanctity and dig-
“ nity of the Redeemer, when we behold
“ him in such familiar conference with, and
“ under the power of, an unclean spirit,
“ who at pleasure transports his sovereign
“ and his judge from place to place, raises
“ him to the most conspicuous stations to
“ expose him to public derision, and wan-
“ tonly and arrogantly propounds to him
“ one foolish enterprize after another. It
“ fills us with horror, as well as astonish-
“ ment, to consider farther that, during all
“ this transaction, Christ must have yield-
“ ed voluntarily to the mere motion and
“ instigation of the devil. For, though
“ it was by the spirit of God that he was
“ carried into the wilderness, yet it was by
“ the devil that he was conveyed from
“ thence to the temple, and placed upon
“ its battlements; a most dangerous and
“ formidable eminence! And, therefore,

“ as the devil could have no power over
“ our Lord, unless by his free consent,
“ Christ must have been accessory to his
“ own dishonour, danger, and tempta-
“ tion*.”

I shall now produce what Mr. F. has advanced with a view to convince us that the representations of a vision may serve equally as well as the objects of sense for the trial, display, and improvement of virtue. But unfortunately in this attempt he has, if I mistake not, ruined his grand scheme.

Mr. F. asserts, that “ what is imaginary
“ no way differs, in appearance, from that
“ which is real, and has the same effect
“ upon the prophet ; who does not, at the
“ time, distinguish between the images of
“ a vision and outward objects. If the
“ mind (he says) be passive, as no doubt
“ it is, in receiving these images, and can-

* Inquiry, pp. 14, 15, 16.

“ not

“ not but judge according to appearances;
“ let it be remembered that just thus it is
“ with regard to the impression made by
“ external objects themselves, and the
“ ideas they raise in the mind; the will
“ having no more power to controul our
“ inward views and apprehensions, in this
“ latter case, than in the former. And as,
“ in both cases, the mind is alike passive
“ in receiving impressions, so, in all other
“ respects, it may enjoy an equal liberty
“ in both. Whether the notice of things
“ is conveyed to it by the instrumentality
“ of the senses, or by a miraculous agency,
“ it may experience the same disposition
“ and sentiments with regard to the things
“ themselves. It may be as capable of a
“ right determination and choice, with re-
“ spect to the representations of a vision, as
“ with respect to the objects of sense.”

Now, from the above account of the
state of a person's mind, whilst experienc-
ing

ing a vision, it appears we have Mr. F.'s own authority to judge, that Christ, during his supposed vision, though passive in *receiving the impressions*, was, *in all other respects*, at liberty; that he must have felt the same *dispositions* and *sentiments*, respecting the images impressed, as he would have done if the real objects, which they represented, had been present to him; and that he was equally capable of a *right determination* and *choice* as at any other time.

Mr. F. himself, therefore, has authorized us to conclude that, though Christ could not, if he would, conceive of his situation, otherwise than as *a wilderness*, and though he could not, if he would, avoid considering himself *in company with the devil*, he was, nevertheless, at liberty to *express his abhorrence* of such society, and to *determine* whether or no he would hold conference with that evil spirit. A familiar conference, however, took place; from which it

L

appears

appears, that Christ knew with whom he was conversing, as he called him by his name: and, notwithstanding the whole transaction be supposed a vision only, the character of Christ must, inevitably, be affected just as if it had been all a reality. Moreover, when he imagined himself conveyed through the air to the battlements of the temple, and likewise to the top of the mountain, he must have been conscious, I think, of giving his voluntary consent*. How much soever, therefore, Mr. F.'s religious feelings were shocked by the common interpretation, he would derive no just relief from his new hypothesis; which leaves the objection, respecting the dishonour of Christ, in full force.

Neither is the objection concerning ab-

* Even if it were admitted that, in conceiving of these transportations, he was subject to the overruling miraculous influence, it is utterly impossible that the *familiar conversation* should have been other than *voluntary*.

furdities

furdities and impossibilities hereby removed: though, indeed, they are no longer ascribed to the devil. But absurdity or impossibility is no more the object of divine than of diabolical power.

After all, I believe, we must be content to take the evangelical narratives of the temptation in their plain literal meaning, as I doubt not the writers of them intended we should. The use, however, which I shall make of them is, to infer from them the propriety of considering well how much credit is due to *accounts of miracles* given by writers who were capable of presenting us with *such a story*.

APPENDIX,

No. II.

IN the year 1792, a pamphlet was published, entitled, *Remarks on Mr. Gilbert Wakefield's Inquiry into the Expediency and Propriety of Public and Social Worship*. It was published without a name; but I believe it was universally ascribed to a lady, whose literary merit has obtained for her a large portion of celebrity; and that it was justly ascribed to her, there seems to be good internal evidence. Near the conclusion of this pamphlet the reader will find what I shall here transcribe. After conceding to Mr. W. that a *reform* in the public worship was to be wished for, and after suggesting some articles which she speaks of as hints offered with diffidence and respect, the eloquent writer proceeds

as

as follows: “Above all, it would be
“desirable to separate from religion that
“idea of gloom, which, in this country,
“has but too generally accompanied it.
“The fact cannot be denied; the cause
“must be fought partly in our natural
“character, which, I am afraid, is not ei-
“ther very cheerful or very social, and
“which we shall do well to meliorate by
“every possible attention to our habits of
“life;—and partly to the colour of our
“religious systems. No one who embraces
“the common idea of *future torments*, to-
“gether with the doctrine of *election* and
“*reprobation*, the insufficiency of virtue to
“escape the *wrath* of God, and the strange
“absurdity which, it should seem through
“similarity of sound alone, has been ad-
“mitted as an axiom, that sins committed
“against an Infinite Being do, therefore,
“deserve infinite punishment—no one,
“I will venture to assert, can believe such
“tenets, and have them often in his
L 3 “thoughts,

“ thoughts, and yet be cheerful. Whence
“ a system has arisen so incompatible with
“ that justice and benevolence which, *in*
“ *the discourses of our Saviour*, are repre-
“ sented as the most essential attributes of
“ the Divine Being, is not easy to trace.
“ It is probable, however, that *power*, be-
“ ing the most prominent feature in our
“ conceptions of the Creator, and that of
“ which we see the most striking image
“ here on earth (there being a greater
“ portion of uncontrouled power, than of
“ unmixed wisdom or goodness to be
“ found amongst human beings), the Deity
“ would naturally be likened to an abso-
“ lute monarch:—and most absolute mo-
“ narchs, having been tyrants, jealous of
“ their sovereignty, averse to freedom of
“ investigation, ordering affairs, not with
“ a view to the happiness of their subjects,
“ but to the advancement of their own glo-
“ ry; not to be approached but with rich
“ gifts and offerings; bestowing favours
“ not

“ not in proportion to merit, but from
“ the pure influence of caprice and blind
“ partiality; to those who have offended
“ them, severe and unforgiving, except in-
“ duced to pardon by the importunate in-
“ tercession of some favourite; confining
“ their enemies, when they had overcome
“ them, in deep, dark dungeons under
“ ground, or putting them to death in the
“ prolonged misery of excruciating tor-
“ tures: These features of human depra-
“ vity have been most faithfully transfer-
“ red to the Supreme Being; and men
“ have imaged to themselves, how a Ne-
“ ro, or a Domitian, would have acted,
“ if, from the extent of their dominion,
“ there had been no escape, and to the du-
“ ration of it no period.

“ These ideas of the vulgar belief, ter-
“ rible, but as yet vague and undefined,
“ passed into the speculations of the school-
“ men, by whom they were combined

“ with the metaphysical idea of eternity,
“ arranged in specific propositions, fixed
“ in creeds, and elaborated into systems,
“ till at length they have been sublimed
“ into all the tremendous horrors of the
“ Calvinistic faith. These doctrines, it
“ is true, among thinking people, are
“ losing ground; but there is still appar-
“ ent, in that class called serious chris-
“ tians, a tenderness in exposing them;
“ a sort of leaning towards them, as, in
“ walking over a precipice, one should
“ lean to the safest side; an idea that they
“ are, if not true, at least good to be be-
“ lieved; and that a salutary error is better
“ than a dangerous truth. *But that error*
“ *can neither be salutary nor harmless which*
“ *attributes to the Deity injustice and cruelty;*
“ *and that religion must have the worst of*
“ *tendencies, which renders it dangerous for*
“ *a man to imitate the being whom he wor-*
“ *ships.* Let those who hold such tenets
“ consider that the invisible Creator has
“ no

“ no name, and is identified only by his
 “ *character*; and they will tremble to
 “ think *what* being they are worshipping,
 “ when they invoke a power capable of
 “ *producing existence in order to continue it in*
 “ *never-ending torments*. The God of the
 “ Assembly’s Catechism is not the *same*
 “ God with the Deity of Thomson’s Sea-
 “ sons, and of Hutcheson’s Ethics *.”

Having presented the reader with this long and interesting quotation, I shall take

* In the 25th chapter of Matthew, the *God of the christians* is represented as, after a long succession of ages, conducting the affairs of the human race to a grand consummation: and at the end of Thomson’s Winter, he, too, has presented us with the termination of this world’s eventful and mysterious scenes; which last most interesting event he has likewise ascribed to the *Divinity whom he worshipped*. The admired writer, from whom the above extract is taken, is requested to compare these two representations, and see how much resemblance she can find.

the liberty to observe, what, in my apprehension, is generally the case, that well-disposed christians sit down to read the *discourses of Christ* with an *unconscious pre-determination* to find in them *nothing but what is good*. How should they contain any thing else? Was not Christ commissioned by heaven for the instruction of mankind; and, for that purpose, was he not furnished with that incomparable wisdom which descendeth from above? And does not every pious christian parent esteem it his duty to impress the belief of this upon the minds of his infant offspring? That the mind of the remarker upon Mr. W. was thus impressed will not, I imagine, be questioned. But, if that had not been the case, she would not have found even those parts of the vulgar system, which are most obnoxious to her, at all incompatible with the doctrine which Christ delivered. On the contrary, she would have perceived that doctrine to have been the *genuine source*

source from which some, at least, of those obnoxious tenets have sprung; and would, therefore, have spared herself the trouble of proposing her ingenious conjectures respecting their origin. Had she read the *discourses of Christ* as she would those of any other man, with a view to learn what they really contained, she would, I think, have understood them as clearly holding out these dogmas.

That the many, the mass of human beings, are *wicked*. That the *good* (comparatively at least) are few. That it is the design of God to confer upon the latter, in a future state, an everlasting felicity; and to inflict upon the former the never-ending torments of hell; or, however, to consign them to long and exquisite misery, the termination of which will be the period of their existence.

No one ever pretended to say that Jesus
Christ

Christ represented the human race as under a *course of discipline*, which would eventually qualify them for a future state of *ultimate virtue and happiness*; though some, it is true, have imagined they found this, or a similar representation, in Paul's epistles. But, if Paul has any where really taught this doctrine, so worthy of the benevolent and universal Parent, how wonderful is it that the *apostle* should have possessed the sublime wisdom which his *master* wanted! For, who was that master? A personage (if we admit his own account) so highly dignified, and of such superior excellence, that he *knew* all the counsels of the Deity, and was truly *known* by none but the Father, *i. e.* God himself. If the above doctrine, however, was really taught by the apostle, he has not only contradicted his master; he has contradicted himself, as will appear to any one who will give himself the trouble to read the passage quoted, page 69, of the preceding Apology.

If,

If, at some future most important period, agreeably to the doctrine of Christ, both good and bad men (the *few* and the *many*) shall be judged by their Maker, and their fates finally determined; it is impossible for Mrs. —, or a person whose understanding is greatly inferior to hers, not to see that the Judge will *then do* what he *always intended*. Ignorant mortals may be wiser to-morrow than to-day; and, therefore, their intentions may, to-morrow, be different from what they now are. Not so the intentions of the omniscient Deity. But then, if the human race are to be disposed of as Christ has informed us, the doctrines so revolting to Mrs. —, the doctrines of *election* and *reprobation*, must inevitably be true.

Furthermore, it is worthy of serious consideration, that the *spirit* of punishment, exhibited in the discourses of Christ, is not that *philosophical spirit* which has for its
object

object the *amelioration*, not only of mankind in general, but likewise of the unhappy individuals who are punished. So far from this, the author of christianity seems, like many others, to have conceived that justice *required* punishment and vengeance to be executed on offenders, without taking any thing further into the account: and to me it is evident (if his words may be trusted) that, when he spoke of the future punishment of the wicked multitude of mankind, *nothing could be more distant from his thoughts, than their miserable torments would be productive of any benefit to them* *.

The

* Having lately read, with much pleasure, a book entitled a Picture of Christian Philosophy, by R. Fellowes, M. A. I there met with the following passage in a note, p. 53, second edition.

“ The eternity of punishments for temporary
 “ offences, and committed by beings who are covered with frailties, seems difficult to be reconciled
 “ to that attribute of INFINITE MERCY, or
 “ *what,*

The respect which I, in common with every one else, entertain for the supposed author

“ *what, with respect to an All-perfect Being, is the*
 “ *same thing, that attribute of INFINITE JUS-*
 “ *TICE, which belongs to the Maker of the uni-*
 “ *verse, and the Father of mankind. May we not,*
 “ *therefore, infer (I speak with deference to older*
 “ *and wiser Theologians), without derogating*
 “ *IN THE LEAST from the truth of scripture, that*
 “ *those passages which describe future punishments*
 “ *as eternal, are to be figuratively construed; that*
 “ *they intend pains of long—not of infinite dura-*
 “ *tion; vast—not irremediable, or never-ceasing af-*
 “ *fiction!* The wisest and best legislators among
 “ men have never considered punishments in any
 “ other light, than as conducive to moral amend-
 “ ment;—and is it not blasphemy, to suppose the
 “ All-wise, All-just, and All-merciful *will ever*
 “ *inflict punishment for its own sake, and without*
 “ *any view to the good, or the reformation of him on*
 “ *whom it is inflicted?* Let not our ignorance of
 “ the true Scripture idiom, and of Eastern phrase-
 “ ology, lead us to this climax of folly and pre-
 “ sumption!!”

This appears to be the warm language of an ingenuous young man. But nothing, surely, except
 the

author of the remarks on Mr. W. induces me to express my wishes that she may,
and

the powerful influence of prejudice, could induce him to think it favourable to the cause he is pleading. I think it quite the reverse. His idea of the nature and design of *punishment*, in conformity with that of the wisest and best legislators, is, indeed, most just. On the contrary, throughout the jewish and christian scriptures, the Divinity is represented, when inflicting punishment, either as acting like a weak mortal, under the dominion of wrathful passion, who seeks to revenge himself for personal injury, or else (which is certainly more dignified) as executing, in a manner awful and solemn, the decrees of *Vindictive Justice*. If Mr. F. could bring himself to read the scriptures as writings which he had never yet seen, and in which he had no particular concern, he would find what I say to be true. But he comes *prepared* by the religious impressions made in his childhood; agreeably to the doctrine of *Association* which he has so well illustrated.

To me the scriptural doctrine of punishment brings its own evidence, that it is not from *God*, but from *men*; the wisest of whom, whatever
were

and hopes that she will, do herself the justice, to inquire what is the *real doctrine* of Jesus Christ, especially as it concerns the CHARACTER of the Supreme Being, *with her mind at perfect liberty.*

were their pretensions, had, unquestionably, much to learn.

As Mr. F. has supposed that *a very long period* of misery may be necessary, in a future state, in order to exterminate the bad habits acquired by wicked men in this, it is to be wished he would, read the delightful and edifying account of the Prison at Philadelphia by the Duke de la Rochefoucault Liancourt.

APPENDIX,

No. III.

MR. ANTHONY ROBINSON, at the conclusion of the second edition of his *History of the Persecutions of Christians, by Jews, Heathens, and Christians**, observes, very naturally, “ Perhaps an inquiring reader will
 “ ask, if so various, so cruel, and so fatal
 “ have been the persecutions of christians,
 “ if christianity have given occasion to so
 “ much suffering, if so many *human sacrifices*
 “ *sices* have been offered up by christians
 “ to their God, is it upon the whole any
 “ advantage to the world, that christianity
 “ has been preached amongst mankind?—
 “ This is a question of great importance;
 “ it will be in vain to reply that these evils
 “ have arisen from the *abuse* of christianity;
 “ we must meet it in its full extent, and

* Published by Johnson, 1794.

“ argue

“ argue the effect of christianity, as it must
“ have been foreseen to [by] him who
“ gave it for a blessing to mankind. This
“ question can only be determined by
“ comparing the good with the evil which
“ men have received, and which has at-
“ tended the spread of christianity. The
“ evil consists of the persecutions which
“ we have already given in detail ; but the
“ good is so great and various, that it is
“ difficult fully to state it. Men must
“ have some powerful motive to induce
“ them to attend to their duty, and the
“ great *body of mankind* are incapable of
“ being attached to their duty, either by
“ *present interest*, or by *fame*. It is little
“ their *labour* can produce, and they are
“ too *obscure* to excite public attention.
“ Where interest and fame are alike impo-
“ tent, religion is all-powerful. The gain
“ and the loss which this life presents to
“ them are easy of estimation, and insuf-
“ ficient to inspire them with energy in
“ action, or to prevent them from becom-

“ing *positively bad*; but the hopes and
 “fears inspired by christianity are as great
 “in their effects as their object is indefi-
 “nite*: we owe it to christianity, there-
 “fore, that the common people attend to
 “the ordinary calls of duty; and chris-
 “tianity is capable of making them, like-
 “wise, perform extraordinary acts.”

By way of illustration, Mr. R. refers to Ramsay's *History of the American Revolution*, and then proceeds with other observations, all of a supposed tendency to shew that the good arising out of the christian religion, when compared with the *evil* it has occasioned, *preponderates superlatively*.

* Mr. R. is certainly an ingenious and an energetic, but, I imagine, that he is, likewise, a rapid writer; which circumstance, it should seem, has produced a little inaccuracy: upon reflection, however, he would see, in a moment, 1st, that *indefiniteness* admits of no *degrees*; and 2ndly, that to say any thing is as great as some other thing which is indefinite, is saying it is as great as we *know not what*.

Nevertheless, it has happened to our ingenuous author (even as it has happened to other inquirers), that he has seen reason to alter his opinion, as appears from a very recent publication of his, entitled, *An Examination of a Sermon preached at Cambridge, by Robert Hall, M. A. &c.*

It is certainly no discredit to a man, but the contrary, to avow that his present opinions differ from those which he formerly entertained, when the difference is the result of conviction, and he is not even suspected of being influenced by sinister views. The change which has taken place in Mr. R.'s mind being, I doubt not, of this description, I shall take the liberty to quote, from his critique upon Mr. Hall, what follows; first observing that Mr. R. is controverting a proposition of the preacher, delivered in these words: *The sceptical, or irreligious system, subverts the whole foundation of morals.*

“ In order to establish the proposition
“ which I have quoted (says Mr. R.), the
“ preacher states that every man *ought* to
“ consult his own selfish interest in all his
“ actions, and that no authority can oblige
“ him to forego any one personal indi-
“ vidual advantage, except in order to
“ obtain a greater advantage by that self-
“ denial.

“ Admitting that this reasoning is true,
“ as far as it goes to the establishment of
“ self-interest as the foundation of moral
“ obligation, it is certainly not true, that
“ a man *does* regulate his conduct by any
“ motive of unsocial self-interest; and
“ without this be proved, it will not fol-
“ low, that the exclusion of the hopes and
“ fears of a future world will destroy the
“ practical virtues of life. Morality is at-
“ tended by most powerful sanctions in
“ this life, which press equally upon the
“ atheist, the thief, and the christian, and
“ of

“ of which the first must feel the full force.
“ Morality consists simply in the discharge
“ of the duties which flow from the rela-
“ tions which subsist betwixt men. Man
“ insulated and alone is a being entirely
“ helpless, and absolutely wretched. So-
“ ciety is the charm of his existence, and
“ the balm of his life. To enjoy this so-
“ ciety, the individual must render himself
“ agreeable to those that surround him;
“ and, in order to this, he must respect
“ and promote their happiness. This im-
“ poses upon him an attention to their
“ wishes, a respect for their rights, and a
“ dread of their violation. He instantly
“ finds that an enlarged self-love and so-
“ cial are the same. Thus deeply rooted
“ are the sanctions of morality, and of uni-
“ versal operation; they are not the crea-
“ tures of arbitrary institution or accidental
“ discovery; they are bottomed in the na-
“ ture of human beings, and, wherever
“ man is found connected with his fellow-
“ man, their influence is felt.

“ These natural and eternal sanctions
“ of virtue operate before *it is possible* to
“ convey to the minds of children religious
“ notions. The accommodations of in-
“ fancy itself, become the great teachers
“ of morals. Before the child knows, or
“ believes aught of heaven or hell, he
“ learns to sacrifice present inclination to
“ procure the advantages of intercourse
“ and love. It may be affirmed, with as
“ much truth, that the social passions de-
“ pend for their existence upon religious
“ belief, as that the antisocial demand that
“ belief to counteract and restrain their
“ energies.

“ The preacher’s argument is very little
“ strengthened by his observation (p. 12)
“ that *all reasoning on morals supposes a*
“ *distinction between inclination and duties,*
“ *affection and rules.* For scarcely any
“ great object of human ambition can be
“ named, which does not require many
“ sacrifices, and which is not opposed by
“ many

“ many inclinations of the individual who
“ pursues it. Do we determine upon the
“ acquisition of fortune, how many plea-
“ sures must we deny ourselves, and how
“ many vexations must we encounter in
“ the pursuit? Man is continually assailed
“ by opposite interests and desires. Some
“ must be sacrificed; their co-existence
“ and indulgence is impossible. In de-
“ termining upon this sacrifice, looks he
“ to heaven or to hell? Ridiculous! He
“ weighs the importance of each present
“ object; and pursues that, which, in his
“ estimation, is the most valuable.

“ Morality is the result of self-love and
“ sympathy, operating constantly on the
“ mind, and forming the character under
“ the influence of *present* objects, of which
“ he will entertain no doubt who examines
“ nature with the steady eye of the author
“ of *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. If
“ any one questions whether present ob-
“ jects

“jects afford a sufficient motive for the
“restraint of passion, and the correction
“of desire amidst contending interests, I
“beg him to observe the conduct of the
“miser, the lover, and the hero. I call
“upon him to leave the field of conjecture,
“and to examine the realities of life, and
“then to tell me *how great* is the influ-
“ence of *future hopes and fears*.

“It may, perhaps, be said, that so ardent
“a desire after one object as is often dis-
“coverable in the miser, the lover, or the
“hero, can only exist in characters of pe-
“culiar strength, and that such consistency
“in pursuit cannot be expected from com-
“mon minds. This may be granted;
“but must it not also be granted that a
“future hope of possible good in a world
“unknown, and of a nature unknown, re-
“quires, in order to influence powerfully,
“still more extraordinary minds? Let
“the preacher’s theory be put to the test
“of

“ of experience. If this prospect of self-
“ ish interest, and individual remuneration
“ in a future life had any effect, as it is
“ infinite and unbounded, reducing all
“ other interests to non-entity, it must an-
“ nihilate all vice, and *perfect* all character.
“ *Facts* shew us that mixed state of things
“ which results from passion, *imperfectly*
“ restrained, and selfishness *imperfectly*
“ counteracted by the influence of reason
“ and feeling upon the social advantages
“ of life; but they discover to us nothing
“ in corroboration of the theory of the
“ preacher, or the actual influence of his
“ future hopes and fears. It may, there-
“ fore, be fairly inferred, that whatever
“ human virtue is, it is by the operation
“ of the actual circumstances of man, by
“ his present hopes and fears, and that a
“ change in the faith of a country, will
“ not effect the morality of it.

“ The real state of morals in different
“ countries

“ countries strongly enforces this observa-
“ tion. In China there is no public re-
“ ligious; and in various regions in the
“ East, the doctrine of a future world is
“ unknown. Many countries have un-
“ dergone an entire revolution in their
“ religious system, and yet the state of
“ morals is the same. Indeed, giving an
“ allowance for the different operation of
“ climate and of the state of civilization,
“ upon the human constitution, there is
“ little variety in the morality of different
“ countries. In other respects, men, so-
“ cial and dependent men, are every where
“ the same; and, although professing op-
“ posite religions, and some no religion at
“ all, are essentially alike in moral con-
“ duct.

“ It is vain to allege the *proper* against
“ the *actual* influence of the hopes and fears
“ of men concerning their future exist-
“ ence; these hopes and fears operate, if
“ they

“they operate at all, upon *man*; a creature
“which we ought to study before we can
“know the kind of moral regimen suitable
“ble for him, or pronounce any thing
“concerning it. If then it be found, in
“*fact*, that future, distant, unknown, inconceivable
“good, does not constitute
“a motive which influences this animal,
“in vain we may declaim for ever upon
“its power, as we may upon that of the
“magnet, which, although of great influence
“upon certain bodies, attracts not
“common earth. The preacher asks,
“(page 13) *What is there to restrain an
“atheist from the commission of crime, when
“it flatters with the prospect of impunity, and
“the certainty of immense advantage?* I
“answer, his sympathies and his fear of
“self-reproach. It is true, that this
“claimer thinks self-reproach a folly,
“where detection can be avoided; but
“unless silenced by the sophistry of super-
“stition, self-reproach will always accom-
“pany

“ pany inhumanity of conduct; it flows
“ from the constitution of man, and is
“ absolutely unavoidable.

“ If the preacher think these sympathies
“ too weak, and this fear too foolish to re-
“ strain atheists from crime, I demand of
“ him to shew me, what is strong where
“ these have been found weak? are the
“ hopes and fears of a future life?

“ Answer, ye Constantines, ye Offas,
“ ye Richards, ye Henrys, ye religious
“ murderers of all ages and nations, did
“ these hopes and fears prevent you from
“ butchering your children, your wives,
“ your connexions? Let us not forget
“ the actual effect of these things. The
“ pinnacle of conjecture suits the religious
“ astronomer for his observations, he
“ thence descries new planets and calcu-
“ lates their motions; but the vale of rea-
“ lity becomes him who would lay down
“ the law for man.”

Now,

Now, though I am not prepared to subscribe to the whole of this *latter extract*, I think it contains important truth, shews the writer's ability, and affords very satisfactory reason for judging that, of the quantity of *good* which has existed in the world during the last seventeen or eighteen centuries, a *much smaller proportion*, than is generally apprehended, ought to be attributed to the christian religion. Let us take the advice of Mr. R. let us *examine the realities of life*, and we shall not remain long in doubt how bad men are deterred from crimes. They are not deterred by *future punishments*, but by the *law of the land*. What *religious* man, who believes most, would esteem his life and property safe, if they were only protected by the *fear of hell*? The truth is, the horrible and everlasting punishments of the christian religion defeat their own purpose. They are not believed; they are perceived to be *inconsistent both with justice*
and

and mercy: besides that men in general will ever be (as nature intended they should) influenced by objects *present*, whose power over their happiness they have experienced, rather than by objects in a *distant and unknown world*. If, indeed, men did thoroughly believe that infinite happiness or misery did certainly await them in a future state, they would be so *overwhelmed* by the consideration, as to be altogether disqualified for the offices of life. This, it should seem, was the case of some, when there was *more faith* upon the earth. What opinion can one entertain of those early christians, who were so desirous of the crown of martyrdom, and so earnest to take possession of eternal felicity, as to *obtrude* themselves on their persecutors, contrary, even, to their master's injunction? And, in later times, instances have not been wanting of *sanguine* persons frantic with unutterable joy, while others, of a *melancholy* complexion, have endured torments

torments similar to what are supposed to be the lot of the damned. But, at present, the number of *true, cordial, christian believers* is not great among the multitude professing christianity.

Nevertheless, whatever has been the *degree of faith actually existing* in the minds of certain men calling themselves christians, they have persecuted their fellow-christians, *even to death*, for not believing creeds dictated by the persecutors and by them styled orthodox; and these christian persecutors have represented such murder as a christian duty. This practice, moreover, has not been confined to one age, or even to one century: insomuch, that the annals of the church have been, with great propriety, termed, annals of blood.

The genuine spirit of christianity is, doubtless, a spirit of benevolence; and, assuredly, many christians in all ages have,

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more

more or less, imbibed it: but it happens, unfortunately (as a little reflection will shew us), that our power to do hurt and injury greatly exceeds our power of doing good. A man who can do nothing else, may, in a moment, by a single act (a murder suppose) do mischief incalculable: while, in order to a good man's effecting any thing greatly and extensively beneficial, many circumstances must come in aid of his benevolence. Now christianity has, *in fact*, supplied fuel to the worst of human passions: and dreadfully far have the effects of christian rancour and animosity extended.

But the spirit of christianity is also a spirit of slavish and implicit belief, hostile to intellectual improvement *.

Considering, then, that the *mass* of mankind is little influenced by religious be-

* See Apology, pp. 107, 108, 109, 110, 111.

lief, considering that the *genuine influence of christian belief* is, in some respects, *unfavourable to human happiness*, considering that, though christianity did not *authorize*, it has eventually *given occasion to*, the most cruel and destructive wars, and likewise to systematical and ingenious tortures, inflicted by christians on their christian brethren — I own it appears to me very doubtful whether the quantity of *evil* resulting from the christian religion, be not *more than equal* to the quantity of *good* which it has produced.

To many reflecting persons it seems improbable, in the highest degree, that the Author of Nature, who communicates his gifts to us by the operations of nature, agreeably to the established laws of the universe, should *break in* upon those laws, by miraculous operations, in order to communicate good to us. And indeed, by philosophical men, who are christians,

it is admitted to be incredible, excepting where that great and wise Being has in view some object of the first magnitude and importance. But this was the case, they apprehended, with respect to what are termed the jewish and christian revelations; the object of the *one* having been to preserve the faith of the Divine Unity among the chosen people, which faith among the rest of the human species was *lost*; the object of the *other*, to reform the world of mankind, so deeply corrupted with vice and wickedness. Thus good Dr. Watts, speaking of the Eternal Deity, says,

“ He saw the nations lie

“ All perishing in sin,

“ And pitied their sad state,” &c.

Now in the jewish history we have an account not only of miracles for the *introduction* of the Mosaic religion, we find there

there a *series* of miracles occurring at intervals during a long period. But as faith, even faith in the Divine Unity, is only valuable in order to something further, can any reasonable man think the Deity would miraculously interpose merely to furnish such a wretched people with this important article of belief, which, *in fact*, has proved no more beneficial to them? Especially, can any man, who seriously reflects, conceive it possible for the Supreme Being to communicate to these Hebrews such a representation of himself as appears in their writings * ?

With respect to the supposed object of what is termed the christian revelation, one would be almost persuaded, that it was worth while to introduce *miracles* for such a purpose, were it accomplished. But what do we learn from history and

* See Apology, pp. 69 and 70; also the greater part of section 1st.

experience? What has been the condition of mankind since the promulgation of christianity? Since that happy æra, have men become wise, and just, and benevolent? Are they, now, such? And does every region of the earth exhibit the delightful scenes of virtuous happiness?

It is to be expected, when an intelligent man proposes to himself some great object, he will choose the *proper means* of attaining it. However, if human designs prove abortive, we are not greatly surpris'd. But, that Infinite Intelligence should form a scheme for the benefit of the human race, that this scheme should fail, and that Infinite Intelligence should be disappointed—this is, indeed, very astonishing. Nevertheless, we must believe it to be true, if we believe the truth of the christian revelation; unless we believe the reformation of the world *never was the object* of that revelation. The Calvinists, upon
this

this head, seem more consistent than some other christians: they believe that the object of christianity was not the *reformation of the world*, but the *salvation of God's elect*, which they believe will certainly be accomplished: for, say they (and they say well), the designs of the Omniscient and the Almighty *can never prove abortive*.

THE END.

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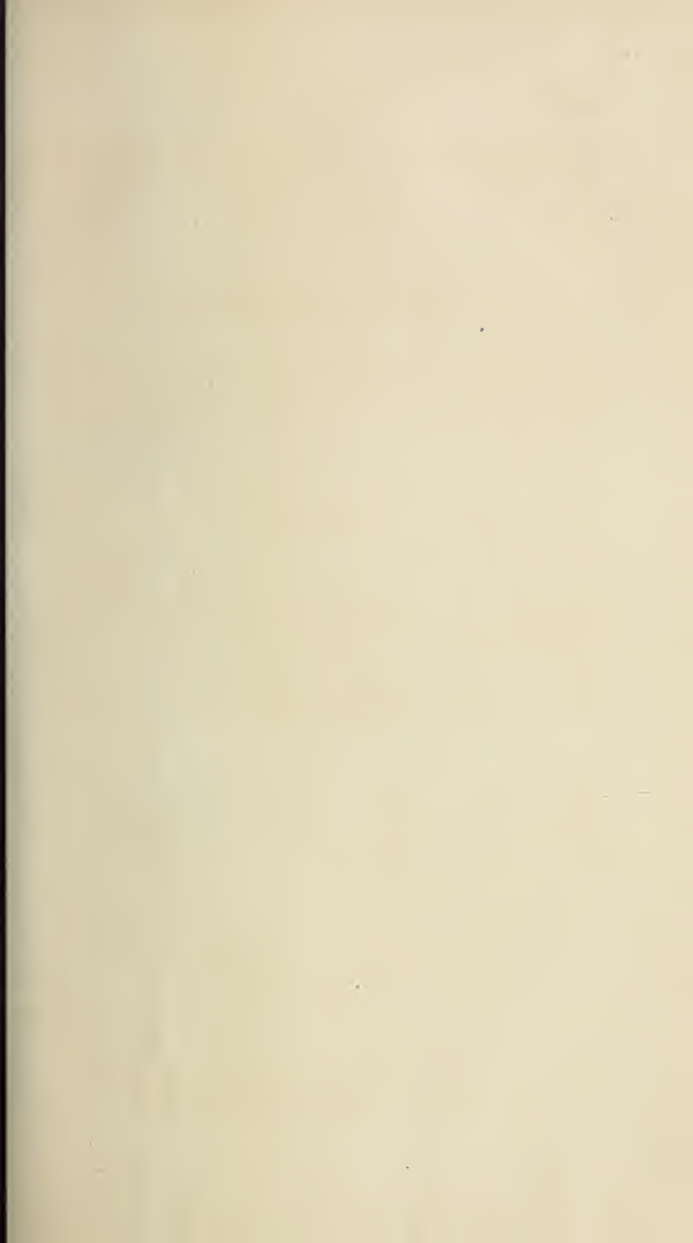
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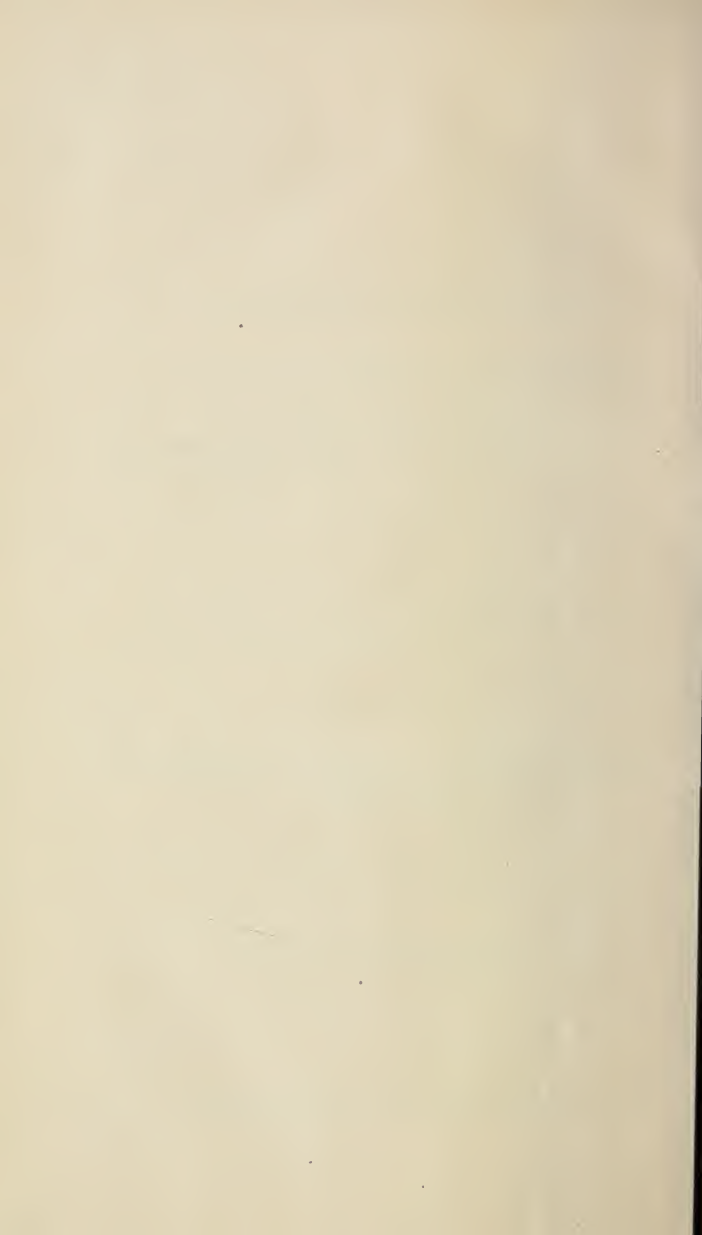
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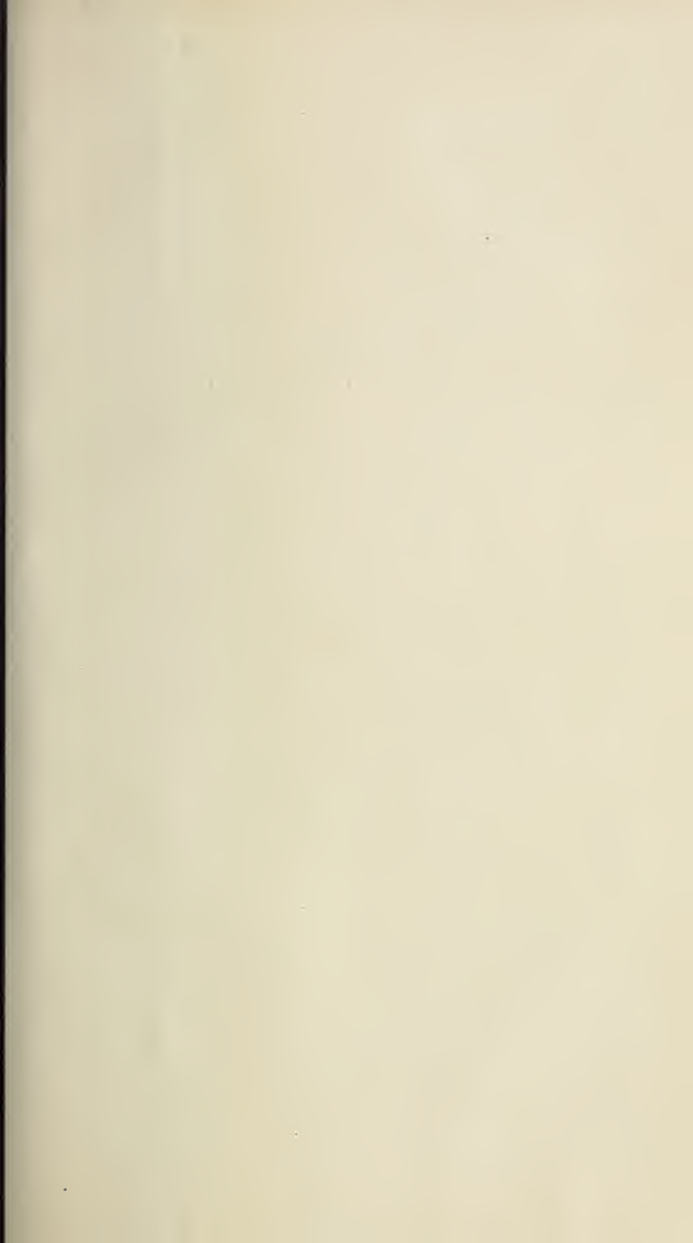
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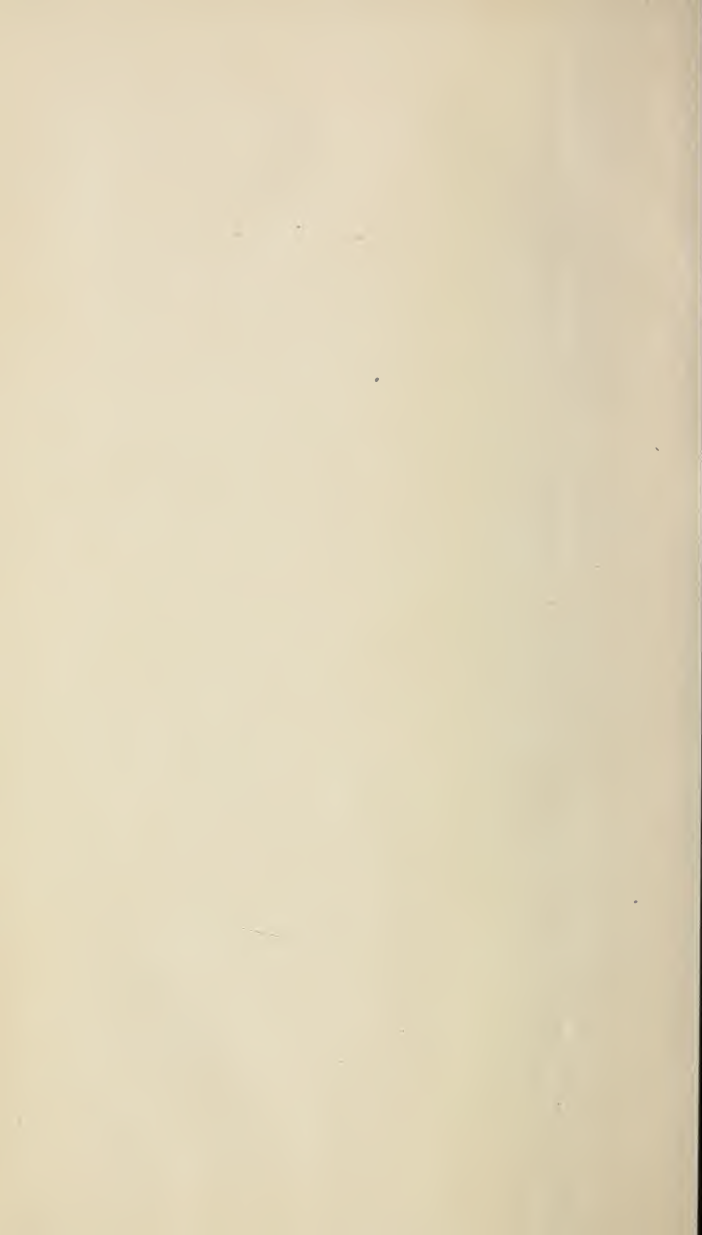
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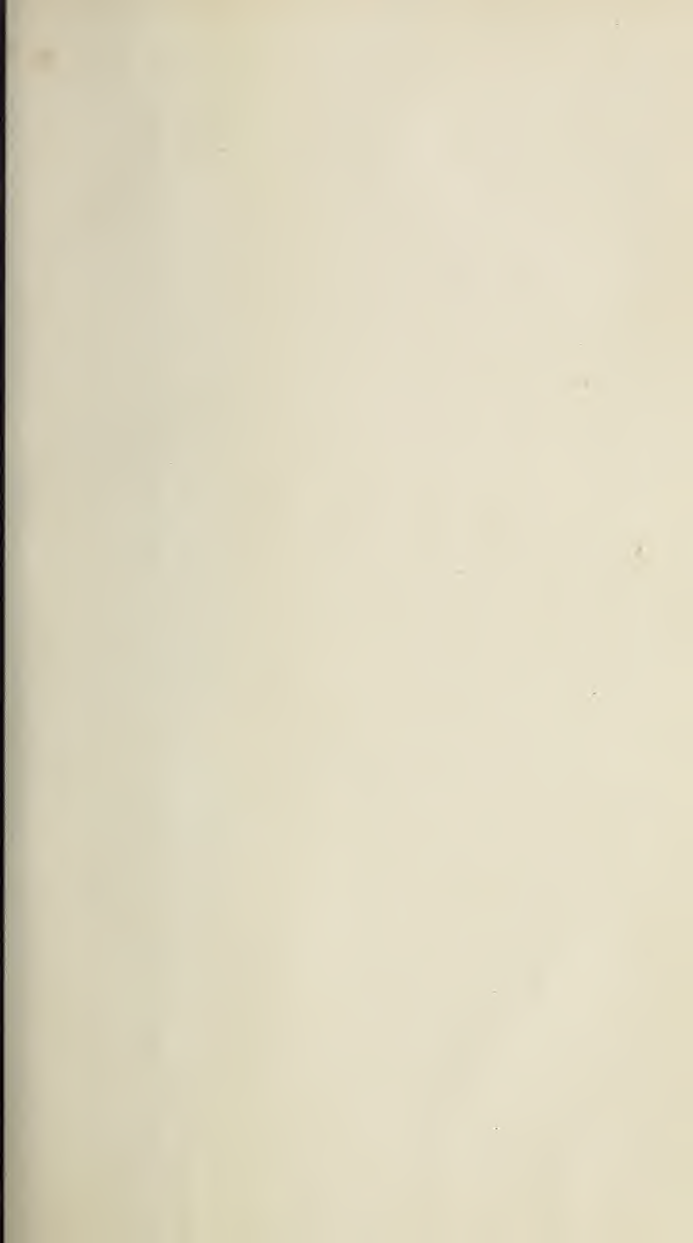
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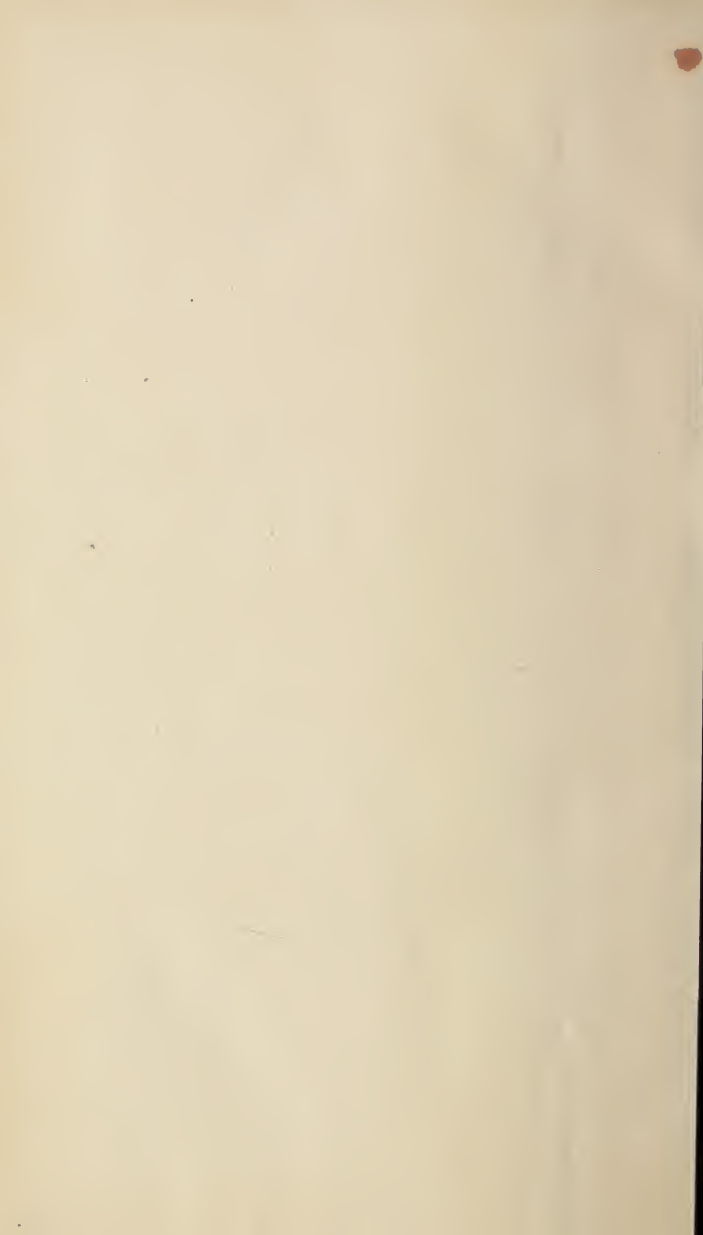














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